



## PHD

### **Living with landmines: mine action, development and wellbeing in post-conflict societies – a case study in Cambodia**

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**Living with landmines: mine action, development and wellbeing in post-conflict societies – a case study in Cambodia**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

July 2015

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## **Abstract**

It is widely recognized that landmines pose a significant threat to the development and recovery of post-conflict societies. What is less well understood is the impact that these weapons have on the everyday lives and wellbeing of affected people and the environments in which they live. This thesis therefore seeks to deepen this understanding by presenting the findings from community-level qualitative research undertaken in Cambodia, one of the most heavily mined countries in the world.

I argue that it is essential to consider the effect that landmines have on people, the environments in which they live, and the relationships between people and environment. In order to explore this, I build on the notion of 'wellbeing ecology' introduced by White & Jha (2014). Wellbeing ecology is a place-sensitive approach that considers the inter-connected and dynamic social, economic, emotional, physical and spiritual relationships that people have with each other and their environments over time. By their very presence, landmines represent a threat to both social and natural systems. They also reconstitute people's experience of place. I explore this in particular through the notion of contaminated landscapes, which draws on and takes forward work on therapeutic landscapes in health geography.

My data reveals that local people and mine action actors understand the effects of landmines differently. While mine action actors focus predominantly on material impact, local people conceptualise landmine impact in a more holistic way, referring to its social, emotional, spiritual, psychological and physical meanings. Data from the village highlights the importance of place for wellbeing, revealing that living in a contaminated landscape negatively affects people's quality of life materially, relationally and subjectively. This demonstrates how a wellbeing ecology approach can usefully add to the understanding of the experience of living with landmines and the effect this has on quality of life.



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## **Abbreviations and Acronyms:**

AP mine	Anti-personnel landmine
AT mine	Anti-tank landmine
AV mine	Anti-vehicular mine
CL	Community Liaison
CMAA	Cambodian Mine Action Authority
CMAC	Cambodian Mine Action Centre
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
GICHD	Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
HALO Trust	Hazardous Areas Life-Support Organisation Trust
HMA	Humanitarian Mine Action
ICBL	International Campaign to Ban Landmines
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
KR	Khmer Rouge
MAG	Mines Advisory Group
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEA	Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
MRE	Mine Risk Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PPA	Paris Peace Accords
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
RCAF	Royal Cambodian Armed Forces
SHA	Suspected Hazardous Area
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNTAC	United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VA	Victim Assistance
WeD	Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Project
WPP	Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways Research Project





## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Landmines continue to threaten the lives of millions of people around the world, often long after conflict has ceased. In response to the threat that these weapons of war pose, the mine action sector has developed over the past three decades. Mine action is currently viewed as a technical and humanitarian issue. Increasingly it is being justified in terms of human impact and how living with landmines affects the wellbeing of local people. However, there is a lack of rigor in how wellbeing is understood and therefore there is a need for a specific approach to conceptualise more fully the impact of landmines. This thesis addresses this gap and:

1. Analyses how the humanitarian literature currently conceptualises the issue of landmines and the effects their presence has on the wellbeing of local people
2. Sets out a socioecological framework, wellbeing ecology, which encompasses human wellbeing in a dynamic relationship with the natural environment
3. Applies this framework in qualitative field research in a mine contaminated village in Cambodia
4. Presents the findings of the fieldwork which interweave the material, relational and subjective dimensions of wellbeing with a particular emphasis on the issue of land
5. Suggests the implications this analysis has for the conceptualisation of the landmine issue within the humanitarian literature
6. Reflects on the implications of this analysis for theory, policy and practice

The overarching aim of the thesis is therefore to deepen the understanding of the ways in which the presence of landmines affects the wellbeing of communities. This is undertaken by answering the following research questions:

### **1.1 Primary research question:**

What are the implications of living with landmines for the wellbeing of local people?

## **1.2 Sub-research questions:**

How do different actors conceptualise mine contamination and the effect it has on wellbeing?

What implications will understanding these perspectives have for theory, policy and practice?

How is wellbeing ecology useful for the conceptualisation of mine contamination?

## **1.3 Overview and justification:**

Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) are widely recognized as posing a significant threat to the livelihood and development of post conflict societies (Maslen 2004). However, mine action is currently facing a significant drop in funding<sup>1</sup>, and in an effort to counter this, there has been a call for more evidence-based evaluations that prove the effectiveness of programmes in improving the quality of life and wellbeing of affected peoples (GICHD 2008). While a number of studies have explored the macro and meso level impacts that remnants of war have on affected populations, research at the micro level is scarce (Roberts and Littlejohn 2005). Harpviken and Millard echo this point and argue that in order to understand the impact of landmines and ERW more fully, and to ensure that mine action programmes are more effective, national level surveys and individual accounts should be supplemented by community level studies as “improved assistance to mine-affected communities must start with a deeper understanding of the situation faced by people living in these communities.” (2000:27). These factors form part of the driving force behind this project, and are coupled with my own personal interest in this subject which is derived from living and working with mine-affected communities and seeing first-hand the challenges that living with landmines pose on a daily basis.

## **1.4 Defining Mine Action:**

Mine Action is defined by the United Nations International Mine Action Standards (UNMAS) as “Activities which aim to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of mines, and ERW including unexploded sub-munitions.” (UNMAS 2003: 23). Mine action, then, is not just about demining, it is also about people, communities, societies and nations who are affected by mines and ERW with the main objective being “to reduce the risk from landmines and ERW to a level where people can live safely; in which economic, social and health development can

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<sup>1</sup> International funding for mine action in 2013 was \$446 million, approximately \$51 million less than in 2012. (ICBL 2014a)

occur free from the constraints imposed by landmine and ERW contamination, and in which the victims' different needs can be addressed." (UNMAS 2003: 23). As such, mine action has been divided into five pillars:

- Demining: the clearance and destruction of landmines and ERW.
- Stockpile destruction: the collection and destruction of landmines and ERW.
- Advocacy: continued efforts at national and international level to stigmatise the production and use of landmines working towards the ultimate goal of a mine-free world.
- Mine Risk Education (MRE): awareness-raising at community level to inform affected populations about the risk of landmines and ERW.
- Victim Assistance: the provision of rehabilitation and reintegration services to landmines survivors and their families ranging from emergency medical treatment to prosthetic limb manufacture and supply and vocational training.

This framework suggests that mine action can be viewed as multi-faceted. However, in reality it is somewhat fractured, with organisations tending to concentrate on one pillar rather than providing a holistic response to the needs of mine affected people. Interestingly, while reducing the environmental impact of mines is mentioned as one of the aims of mine action, none of the five pillars relates to this issue. By adopting a wellbeing ecology approach to view the impact of landmines, my aim is to present a different lens through which to view mine contamination. This approach emphasises the inter-connected and dynamic social, economic, emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual relationship that people have with each other and their environments. In doing so landmine impact is reconceptualised as a combined humanitarian and environmental issue, highlighting the importance of considering socioecological relations when assessing humanitarian situations.

Having defined mine action, it is now pertinent to explore the origins of the sector in order to better understand the driving force behind it and the way that it has evolved over time.

### **1.5 The History of Mine Action:**

Conflict affects the social, economic, and political structure of nations, and in its wake, the continued threat of landmines negatively impacts on the population and infrastructure of a country, hindering reconstruction and development. Throughout history, mines have been

utilised by both invading and defending armies in international wars, and by warring factions and guerrilla groups in internal conflicts. To date, seventy-six countries remain contaminated by mines and other Unexploded Ordnance (UXO), and although difficult to quantify accurately, millions of minefields remain unmapped and uncleared around the world (ICBL 2010).

The presence of landmines and UXO impact not only on the population in terms of risk of death or injury, but also in the rebuilding process of post-conflict societies that is hindered by mine-contaminated land that reduces access to resources, livelihoods and services (UNIDIR 2008). As Unruh *et al* state, "Because the primary purpose of landmine use in the developing world is to cause and maintain avoidance and abandonment of certain land use among a population during wartime, the translation of this effect during recovery from war has significant political-ecological repercussions (APHRQ/PHR 1993)." (2003:842). The use of mines to hinder the movement of armies in times of conflict renders roads unusable, land unworkable, and once peace has been achieved these remnants of war "directly or indirectly affect almost every aspect of national life in mine-contaminated countries and the daily lives of those who live with them." (Roberts and Williams 1995:3). It can therefore be argued that landmines pose a significant threat to the post-conflict reconstruction and development of societies at the micro, meso and macro levels. For sustainable development to be realised, it is therefore imperative to work towards a mine-free world, and until this has been achieved, to ensure that the needs of affected populations are met through mine action and development programmes.

In response to the understood threat of landmines and UXO, the mine action sector has evolved over the past three decades, into a multi-million pound industry. It is well documented that mine action emerged from the necessity to clear mines and to provide assistance to mine-affected communities in post-conflict Afghanistan following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in the late 1980s (Maslen 2004). Traditionally, mine clearance had been undertaken by the national military of the contaminated country, without external assistance. However, Afghanistan was resource-poor and did not have the military capacity to undertake such large-scale clearance. As it was increasingly understood that demining was essential for post-conflict development and reconstruction to take place, the UN made its first call for funds to set up national Afghan demining NGOs to undertake clearance activities, many of which are still in existence today (GICHD 2008). Military personnel from the UK, US and Australia set up training camps in neighbouring Pakistan, in order to educate Afghan people drawn from the civilian refugee population in clearance techniques (Maslen 2004). Demining, however, was only one

facet of the problem, and the International Committee of the Red Cross set up the first prosthetics centre in Afghanistan in 1989 in order to treat and rehabilitate landmine survivors (Croll 2008). It was also recognized that awareness-raising projects were necessary to inform refugees and internally displaced persons returning to their homes about the dangers of mines and ERW.

The UN, however, were not the only people concerned with the landmine situation in Afghanistan, and 1988 also saw the birth of the first international mine action NGO. Guy Willoughby set up the Hazardous Areas Life-Support Organisation (HALO Trust) and a year later, Rae McGrath established the Mines Advisory Group (MAG). Both HALO and MAG remain key players within the mine sector working in a variety of post-conflict settings and state that they are neutral, non-profit organisations. In 1992, Handicap International, an NGO that had been working for ten years on disability issues, made an alliance with MAG and established its first mine action operations in Cambodia and Iraq (GICHD 2010a). In the same year, Norwegian People's Aid established their first mine action programme in Cambodia. Since then, a variety of NGOs have been established that focus on different elements of mine action in a variety of post-conflict settings.

Following the first mine action programme in Afghanistan, Kuwait became the next major arena for the mine action sector after the cessation of the Gulf War in 1991. However, unlike Afghanistan, Kuwait had the finances to fund its own clearance programmes, and approximately US\$ 700 million was spent on contracts with commercial demining companies, many of which were set up for that exact purpose. However, as Maslen (2004) notes, at that time there were no international standards governing demining, which led to the unnecessary deaths of a number of demining staff, and an unsystematic approach to clearance activities.

In the years that followed a number of other countries that had recently signed peace agreements requested assistance with the clearance of landmines and UXO. Cambodia was the first, in 1992, and a mine action programme was established that went on to become one of the largest in the world. Mozambique and Angola closely followed, although the interventions were not without difficulties, and particularly in the case of Mozambique, political struggle. Since then, numerous countries such as Bosnia, Croatia, Iraq, Vietnam, Laos, Sudan and Sri Lanka have requested assistance, and mine action programmes are currently in place in over thirty countries.

At its inception, demining was deemed the domain of military personnel as it was seen as a highly technical arena that required extensive explosives training, and was viewed as a separate stand-alone post-conflict activity that was undertaken in isolation (GICHD 2008). However, despite investment in research into a variety of demining techniques, the methods used today are very similar to those used in World War II (Croll 2008). There is a growing body of research surrounding demining techniques that aims at developing new methods of clearance that includes mine detection dogs, plants, bees and rats, robotic mechanisms and imaging systems. Despite a significant amount of funds being earmarked for such research, demining remains a painstakingly slow process that is generally undertaken manually at great personal risk to the deminers. Developing local capacity for clearance has remained a priority within the sector, and there are now numerous national and international organisations, governmental and non-governmental, not for profit and commercial, working within the sector with the aim of achieving a mine-free world. However, this objective remains a distant goal, and additional activities to protect, inform and provide assistance to affected communities continue in tandem with demining.

The increase in mine action activities brought a myriad of actors into the mine sector and continued efforts were made in the 1990s to professionalize the sector, which resulted in the introduction of the International Mine Action Standards in 2001 which form the basis for best practice today. This professionalization continues and more recent guidelines have been published on cluster munitions<sup>2</sup> (GICHD 2008). It is also noted that there are tensions between the different actors working within the mine sector, which has resulted in an increased focus on coordinating mine action efforts, both within the sector, and also with wider reconstruction and development agendas. As Kjellman *et al* note, “In order to be successful, interventions must find ways of meeting the needs of target groups and beneficiaries, while effectively utilising the unique assets different actors are able to bring to the situation.” (2003: 856). Improved co-ordination within the sector and the integration of mine action with development can therefore be viewed as essential if the sector is to provide a holistic response to the needs of mine affected people in the future.

From its origins as a stand-alone range of activities that took place in emergency environments, mine action has evolved into a sector that has become part of the broader

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<sup>2</sup> Cluster munitions or cluster bombs are “weapons made up of a hollow shell which contains smaller bombs called submunitions.” (ICBL 2014b)

reconstruction and development strategies of post-conflict societies. It can therefore be seen that mine action has developed from its inception in Afghanistan to a complex sector that lies within both the humanitarian and development spheres.

### **1.6 The International Anti-Landmine Movement and International Law:**

As outlined above, mine action was established in the late 1980s. However, it is important to document the historical sequence of events that brought mine action to the top of the political agenda. Mine action came to the fore in the 1990s, in part, because of the high profiles of some of its key supporters, such as Diana, Princess of Wales. Images of Princess Diana meeting landmine survivors that highlighted the humanitarian impact of landmines on individuals and communities in post-conflict societies were beamed around the globe. This publicity led to a massive increase in donor funding for mine action programmes and projects aimed at improving the lives of affected peoples. Simultaneously a group of NGOs joined forces to establish the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), with the aim of bringing about an international ban on the continued use of landmines. This coalition of NGOs eventually numbered 1400 organisations from over 70 countries (Rutherford 2000) and the sustained advocacy on the part of the ICBL led to the unprecedented development and implementation of the anti-landmine Convention (or Ottawa Treaty) that was adopted in 1997 and became international law on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1999. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the ICBL in 1997 brought yet further publicity to the campaign, legitimizing their efforts to rid the world of landmines. Since then, the Convention has been signed and ratified by 161 State Parties (ICBL 2013). However, there are notable exceptions to the Ottawa Treaty, including the USA<sup>3</sup>, Russia, Singapore, North Korea and Burma, all of which continue to manufacture and sell landmines.

The Ottawa Treaty provides the framework for mine action and is the foundation for international efforts to eliminate landmines from the world. The Convention bans the use, stockpiling, transfer and production of anti-personnel (AP) mines and sets out the terms that signatories must abide by. Article 5 of the Convention states: “Each State Party undertakes to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible but not later than ten years after the entry into

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<sup>3</sup> The USA is currently reviewing its landmine policy, although it has still not signed the Convention. However, there are indications that this may change. In 2014, the Obama administration agreed to stop the acquisition and production of mines, and stated that the US will not use AP mines outside of the Korean Peninsula, and will destroy stockpiles of mines that are not needed for the defense of the Republic of Korea (US State Department 2014).



force of this Convention for that State Party.” (United Nations 1997). In addition, the Convention requires signatories to destroy any stockpiles of mines within four years of signing the Treaty; undertake mine risk education and ensure that civilians are excluded from mined areas; provide care and assistance to those injured by landmines in order to foster social and economic reintegration; offer assistance to other State Parties where needed and adopt a national strategy for ensuring the implementation of the Convention. Each State Party is required to provide an annual progress report, as outlined in Article 7, documenting the national strategy, the location (where possible) of all mined areas and the quantity and type of AP mines destroyed. Heavily contaminated countries that are unable to meet the ten-year deadline for clearance of all mines can apply for an extension of up to an additional ten years.

Having briefly documented the origins and history of mine action, I will now outline the structure of this thesis.

### **1.7 Outline of the thesis:**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters, which are summarised below:

Chapter 2 presents a review of the humanitarian and mine action literature in order to contextualise mine action as an integral part of the landscape of this research. In doing so I explore the overall nature and structure of humanitarianism and mine action, the ethos underpinning both sectors, the way local people are conceptualised within the literature and the challenges mine action faces as it endeavours to improve the lives and wellbeing of affected people.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the context in which I undertook my fieldwork by exploring the history of the country, present day Khmer society, the current landmine situation and the mine action sector in Cambodia.

Chapter 4 sets out the conceptual framework of my thesis. Wellbeing ecology is a place-sensitive approach that considers the inter-connected and dynamic social, economic, emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual relationships that people have with each other and their environments. Within this socioecological approach, place is conceptualised as landscape, defined as the site for the interplay between humans and the environment. I consider what happens if a place becomes physically contaminated with, for example, landmines, the impact that this would have on the people living within this environment, and the changes this would

bring to the social, political, emotional, economic and spiritual landscapes of peoples' lives. This concept I have called contaminated landscapes and offers a different lens through which to view the ways that the presence of landmines affects many different facets of peoples' lives and wellbeing.

Chapter 5 documents the methodology of the project, which utilises a variety of qualitative data generation methods that include semi-structured interviews, participatory photography, photo-elicitation interviews and observation. In addition the chapter details my decision for choosing Cambodia as the context, outlines my sampling strategy, discusses ethical considerations, which were an on-going concern right the way through my thesis and finally contains reflections on my fieldwork, and more specifically, how my own wellbeing was affected when living in a mine contaminated landscape.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from one vantage point: mine action actors. Drawing on interviews conducted with both international and national mine action actors the chapter considers the institutional and organisational environments in which mine action is situated, and how these shape the conceptualisation and response to landmine impact.

Chapter 7 presents the villager perspective of the impact that landmines have on their lives and wellbeing and is divided into three parts. The first part explores what wellbeing means for the villagers. The second part presents villager understandings of the ways that the presence of mines affects their wellbeing. The third part considers the villagers' lives and wellbeing in a partially contaminated landscape.

In this final chapter I explore the implications of my findings for theory, policy and practice. I begin by contrasting the mine action actor and villager conceptualisations of landmine impact before moving on to outline the contribution of wellbeing ecology to theories of socioecological relations. I then discuss the three main contributions of this thesis: the natural environment as the missing element in current mine action thinking; mine action as a political process and the necessity of combining mine action with development. I then discuss some of the wellbeing dilemmas and trade-offs faced by the villagers as they moved from living in a contaminated to a partially contaminated landscape. The chapter concludes by considering the strengths and weaknesses of this thesis, before briefly outlining future areas for research and discussing the contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes.

## **Chapter Two: Humanitarianism and Mine Action**

From the outset, due to the technical nature of landmine clearance, mine action was viewed as a standalone, isolated activity within the broader humanitarian sphere (Skara 2003). Mine action can therefore be seen to be both a part and apart from the humanitarian sector. In addition, as mine clearance is a painstakingly slow process that takes place in emergency settings as well as within countries that are in the process of re-building post-conflict, it can be argued that mine action also falls within the sphere of development. As Carrier asserts, “Addressing the problem of mines and other ERW must be considered a humanitarian and development issue that requires a multi-dimensional and participatory response to produce more effective interventions that simultaneously develop a community and release it from the wider impacts of mines and ERW.” (2011:26). Mine action can therefore be characterised as a bridge between humanitarianism and development that is shaped by both of these broader environments. However, the transition from isolated to integrated is not an easy one, and, as Horwood (2003) asserts, mine action is in danger of drifting ideologically. He contends that the current focus on socioeconomic impact and cost-benefit analysis as the basis for interventions has blurred the original rationale behind the sector – to ensure that landmines no longer threatened the rights of civilians to security and dignity. But what is the nature of the mine action sector and how is it structured? What is the ethos underpinning the sector? How are local people conceptualised within the literature? And what challenges does the sector face as it strives to improve the lives and wellbeing of mine-affected people? These are the core questions that I seek to answer in this chapter, in order to contextualise mine action as an integral part of the landscape of this research.

The decision to review both the humanitarian and mine action literature in conjunction also has a more practical underlying rationale. While I believe that it is important to present a contextual backdrop for mine action by exploring humanitarianism as the wider environment in which it is situated, a review of the literature revealed that there was a relative dearth of academic work on mine action. Much of the literature surrounding landmines is practitioner based and is found in policy documents, programme and project reports and articles in the *Journal of ERW and Mine Action* published by the James Madison University. Bolton (2010) argues that a lot of this is technocratic, which leads to mine action being stripped of the “political, economic, social and cultural layers that are so crucial to understanding how it really works.” (2010: 180). While a number of books have been written detailing the history of mines

(cf. Croll 2008; Davies & Dunlop 1994), country case studies (cf. Davies & Dunlop 1994; Roberts & Williams 1995; Winslow 1997) and resource books on landmines (cf. McGrath 2000; Maslen 2004), there is a scarcity of academic literature on mine action. As Bolton contends, unlike other disciplines such as community studies and health within international development, “there is not a long pedigree of academic research in mine action” (2010:2). This led me to the conclusion that although there is a small, but growing body of academic work on mine action, which this thesis can usefully add to, I would also have to draw on the much more extensive base of literature surrounding humanitarianism.

Debates within humanitarianism are many and varied and include ideological discussions of what constitutes humanitarianism, the contested principles guiding humanitarian action, the rights versus needs debate, bearing witness and the changing environment (both political and geographical) in which humanitarianism takes place. While I acknowledge these debates, this chapter will concentrate on four key issues in order to explore the nature of mine action. These are: moralities and motivations; politicization and professionalization; accountability and impact assessment, and humanitarianism and development. I begin each section by reviewing the broader humanitarian literature before narrowing the focus more specifically to mine action and the way that these debates are understood by the sector. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the nature of mine action and how this influenced the shape of my research, prompting me to include the voices of local people, which I believe are a missing element in both the humanitarian and mine action literature.

## **2.1 Moralities and Motivations:**

Within humanitarianism there is much debate concerning what motivates organisations to undertake activities in particular places at particular times and the underlying morality that drives these interventions. The ethos behind humanitarianism (Opeskin 1996) is, it could be argued, the starting point for the relationship between the givers and receivers of aid in whichever form it may take. However, before beginning a discussion of what could be viewed as the underlying rationale for humanitarian action, it is useful to start with a definition.

Humanitarianism is defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as: “The impartial, independent and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate need because of conflict and natural disasters” (1994) and was, and in many cases, still is, the standardized definition adopted throughout the sector. However, what drives humanitarian action is open to question, and represents one of the key debates within the sector. Feardon (2008) argues

that it is the underlying motivation that differentiates humanitarianism from other types of intervention and that organisations motivated purely by self-interest should not in themselves be considered humanitarian. It is, instead, the desire to alleviate human suffering that drives humanitarianism, although where the boundaries of this lie are somewhat opaque. Hopgood puts forward an interesting discussion of what it means to be an humanitarian organisation. He asks, if Wal Mart offered to put additional money into an humanitarian emergency, but did so only because of the positive spin they could put on it in marketing terms, should their money be refused? And could they be called a humanitarian organisation? This is a question of morals, of motivations behind actions – should people profit from suffering? It could be argued that certain people and organisations in the sector are already doing so. Take, for example, commercial demining companies that charge for clearance activities. They are providing a much needed commodity in extreme circumstances, but perhaps, as Hopgood asserts, it is the motivation to alleviate suffering that marks the difference between humanitarian action and business, although I would argue that there is a distinctly blurred boundary between the two.

Calhoun (2008) argues that humanitarian action originates in and is motivated by a multitude of reasons, which can be captured by considering three contested questions: are humanitarians trying to improve the overall wellbeing of all humanity? Are humanitarians seeking to stop the suffering of people everywhere in an impartial and neutral fashion? Or are humanitarians responding to particular instances of human suffering created by conflict? These questions highlight the debate surrounding where the moral and practical boundaries of humanitarian action lie and demonstrate that there are a variety of different approaches and motivations to humanitarianism. But why has this come about? Hugo Slim explores morality and its difficulties within the humanitarian sector for actors working as third parties in conflict zones and states that “One of the main reasons why humanitarian principles have been difficult to clarify and affirm in the last five years must be that there are now so many different organisations trying to assert themselves as ‘humanitarians’. The proliferation of NGOs in particular (which has been an inevitable consequence of Western donor policy in recent years) has led to wide differences in the ethical maturity and political sophistication of various organisations which are all competing to work in the same emergency.” (Slim 1997a:344)

Perhaps then, a universal morality is no longer tenable within the humanitarian sphere, if it ever truly existed, due to the proliferation of organisations that have now entered the field calling themselves humanitarians. The plethora of different organisations from human rights advocates to emergency medics and everything in between bring different approaches and

ideologies which affect their policies and practices when undertaking interventions. Fiona Terry, in her analysis of humanitarianism argues that, "The divergent views on the purpose of humanitarian action have obvious implications for the possibility of promoting an ethical framework that is applicable or acceptable to all aid organisations." (2002:18). This has serious implications for humanitarianism as a whole which originated in order to meet the needs of vulnerable and at risk people due to conflict or natural disasters, utilising the principle of humanity as the guiding motivation for all actions. Taking Tony Vaux's broad definition of the principle of humanity as "concern for people in need" (2001:5), how then can the numerous actors with their differing moralities and motivations coordinate responses to humanitarian crises that actually place the needs of affected populations at the heart of the matter? In a discussion of the increase of actors within the humanitarian sphere, and the challenge this brings when trying to apply a universal framework to an arena where there are multiple actors operating under sometimes very different principles, Claudia McGoldrick states, "On the other hand, humanitarian response itself is increasingly within the remit of new actors, including the private sector, new NGOs and foreign military forces, often with ways of operating that are different from traditional approaches and not necessarily based on humanitarian principles. This increasingly calls into question the 'value added' of traditional humanitarian actors, as well as existing coordination mechanisms by which they operate." (2011:976). It can therefore be seen that the crowded market place of humanitarianism and the wide range of motivations behind the different actors presents an even more complex picture than it would seem at first glance. Questions are raised regarding the degree to which organisations are motivated by a universal desire to alleviate suffering as opposed to fulfilling their own institutional mandates and furthering their own sometimes political ends. Perhaps, it could be argued, it is now a matter of attempting to find a balance between maintaining the underlying ethos and morality of providing aid to those in need with the more practical and political considerations of securing funding, and working within increasingly restrictive structures.

In his historical analysis of the humanitarian sector, Barnett (2011) argues that in order to understand the present incarnation of the humanitarian sector, it is important to look to its origins and track changes over time. He states that, "In this book I reject an overly romantic and an overly cynical reading of humanitarianism. Instead I treat humanitarianism as a morally complicated creature, a flawed hero defined by the passions, politics and power of its times even as it tries to rise above them." (2011:7). And herein lies the crux of the matter. Humanitarianism has, for many, been viewed through rose-tinted spectacles; the noble altruists travelling to foreign and faraway lands who risk their own lives in the quest to

alleviate the suffering of the distant 'other', separated from the morally tainting hand of politics and power by the underlying principles of neutrality, independence, humanity and impartiality. This, however, is a misconception, and instead I contend that a realistic analysis of the situation would be that many humanitarian organisations are embroiled within the political power struggles of donor governments and nation states to influence foreign policy through the provision and withholding of aid. As Barnett states, "Any act of intervention, no matter how well intended, is also an act of control. Humanitarian governance may have its heart in the right place, but it is still a form of governance, and governance always includes power." (2011:12). This raises another interesting aspect of humanitarianism, the power that donors have over aid organisations, and indeed the power that organisations have over local people, a rarely mentioned facet of humanitarianism.

In humanitarian settings, the knowledge of external 'experts' is generally privileged over local understandings of situations and it is rare to find instances whereby the coping strategies of local people and communities are actively sought out and developed. Instead, the underlying moral code is that aid agencies are the professionals who have come to provide assistance to the passive victims of conflict. Or, in the words of Donini, "The humanitarian discourse is shaped by thinkers and policy-makers in the North. It leaves little room for indigenous approaches which may not fit comfortably with the northern humanitarian dogma. Second, it privileges the roles and functions of the outsiders, and thus results in the obfuscation of both the coping mechanisms of local communities in dealing with crisis and the role of the non-western humanitarian traditions, which constitute the hidden universe of humanitarianism." (2007:160). This is in marked contrast to the enthusiasm for participation and community-based approaches favoured by development organisations, and may go some way to explaining the tensions between integrating humanitarianism with development, which will be discussed later in the chapter. While it is understandable that emergency situations require quick and decisive actions in order to alleviate suffering, the lack of genuine engagement with local people points to a potential weakness of the humanitarian sector that can have detrimental consequences in the longer term.

#### **2.1.1 Moralities and motivations: mine action**

Within the mine action sector, there are also a multitude of actors, ranging from non-profit international NGOs to commercial demining organisations, national clearance agencies to local village de-miners. Each actor and organisation brings their own ethos, but to date there is a relative dearth of literature on the moralities and motivations of mine action. This highlights

an existing gap in the literature that will be addressed in Chapter 6, where I discuss individual motivations for working in the sector and how these shape the attitudes, behaviour and actions of the mine action actors I interviewed.

While there is a scarcity of research exploring the motivations of international mine action actors, one article, written by Ruth Bottomley (2003) presents the findings from a study of the reasons why Cambodian village deminers undertake mine clearance. Her research, which was negatively received by much of the mine action sector, explored the motivations and rationale behind villagers' decisions to undertake landmine clearance themselves by interviewing village de-miners in order to understand how risk was perceived and why these people decided to go out and clear landmines. She found that "Village de-miners in Cambodia demonstrate the inherent ability of people living in difficult and dangerous situations to draw on existing knowledge and skills to develop strategies of self help. The presence of village de-miners forces recognition that, in contrast to their usual depiction as passive victims, communities affected by landmines are in fact active subjects, dealing with their own local situations in their own terms." (2003:824). She goes on to assert that, "It is clear that there is a need both for mine action to become more accountable to the people it seeks to help and for those people to be allowed to play a greater and more active role in mine action, on the premise that awareness and understanding on both sides works best when communities are actively involved. People such as village de-miners who undertake high risk activities can become key resource people for mine action interventions because of their knowledge of both the local mine problem and the main people at risk." (2003:834).

Bottomley (2003) argues that the voices of local people need to be not only heard, but heeded if future mine action projects are to successfully meet the needs of affected communities. In addition, she contends that mine action actors need to acknowledge and accept that although they may be viewed as international experts within their own arena, village de-miners are the experts within their own situations, having lived and in some cases sown and cleared landmines for numerous years. This is a compelling argument and one of the few pieces of literature that attempts to understand motivation from a local perspective, or indeed from any perspective at all. In general terms, the technocratic mine action sector is home to numerous ex-armed forces personnel who have absolute faith in their own abilities to provide 'expert' knowledge and to clear mines from the grounds. This has led to mine action becoming increasingly technically focused – the motivation to clear mines taking precedence over meeting the needs of affected people. This is not without its critics, and as Bolton (2010)



argues it is imperative that the 'human face' of mine action is emphasized, as outlined in the 1997 Bad Honnef framework<sup>4</sup>, otherwise the sector faces the risk of becoming "distracted by commercial and strategic priorities." (p. 178).

While it is the alleviation of suffering that distinguishes humanitarianism from other forms of interventions, the way that such activities are implemented is contentious. The reification of the knowledge and skills of external aid personnel and organisations to provide solutions characterises local people as passive victims waiting for assistance, rather than active agents who may already have developed their own coping mechanisms and strategies in order to survive. There is no doubt that the majority of aid workers are motivated by a desire to assist people who are vulnerable and at risk, but individual altruistic tendencies are now being challenged and weighed against the backdrop of an increasingly professional and politicised sector that forces individuals and organisations to tread a fine line between meeting the needs of the local people as well as the requirements of funding bodies.

## **2.2 Politicization and Professionalization:**

The increasing politicisation of aid has, as Curtis (2001) argues resulted in a changing role for humanitarian aid, called the 'new humanitarianism'. Fiona Fox (2001), in her paper exploring the underlying moral stance of new humanitarianism states that many aid organisations and donor governments have adopted a rights-based approach to development that has now seeped into humanitarian action, although this has not been without its difficulties. She states, "One look at the way the rights-based approach is being used in humanitarian conflict shows that the human rights approach means the elevation of political rights over basic needs." (2001:283). The new humanitarianism can be characterized as more rights-focused, politically embedded and aimed at peace-building (Fox 2001), and has opened the door for a multitude of new actors within the humanitarian sector including the military, NGOs, advocates and others who would not previously have been viewed as humanitarians. While many have applauded the move towards a more rights-based approach (c.f. Slim 1997b), the new humanitarianism is not, however, without its critics. Ensuring that the rights of every person are being met is a very different approach to ensuring that the needs of people are met. A rights based approach opens the door for political agendas, leading in some cases to aid being

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<sup>4</sup> The Bad Honnef Framework was developed in 1997 by NGOs in order to guide the development aspect of mine action and has six principles: Do no harm; moving beyond technocracy; protecting the vulnerable; participation; stewardship and building peace. (Bolton 2010)

withheld from those in need. Alternatively, a needs based approach, considered the traditional motivation for humanitarianism, brings with it a focus on the material shortages in peoples' lives, and provides short term alleviation of suffering rather than addressing the root causes.

Fiona Fox (2001) in her examination of the new humanitarianism advises caution, arguing that with the overt politicization of aid comes the danger of organisations being used by donors in broader political games, ushering in a new era of conditionality whereby aid is strategically deployed or withheld on political grounds that produces "a hierarchy of victims in which some are more deserving than others." (2001:275). The use of the word victim conceptualises local people within the humanitarian sphere as powerless, who have been subjected to atrocities, and are unable to help themselves so passively wait to receive assistance from external experts who are far better placed to assess their needs than the local populations. More worrying is the fact that some people's needs are now being considered as more important than others, not a new idea, but a sea change in relation to the universal principle of humanity that has previously underpinned humanitarianism. This then is a question of power: the power to decide who receives assistance and who does not based on political considerations rather than an assessment and prioritization of need. While political interests have always influenced the amount of aid allocated to different populations, the new humanitarianism has arguably made the politics of aid more overt.

The politicization of aid is a contentious issue and subject to much debate within the humanitarian literature. Claudia McGoldrick (2011) in her article on the future of humanitarian action from an ICRC perspective discusses the politicization of aid and the way in which humanitarian actions are now being utilised by donor states to directly or indirectly contribute to national interests. She asserts that this is problematic, and argues that while "Humanitarian action cannot happen in a political vacuum" (2011:974) this creates challenges for organisations who are trying to maintain their humanitarian principles. In a similar vein, Donini argues that "Even those [humanitarian organisations] who try to distance themselves from politics, or alignment with western foreign policy objectives, are part of a web of contacts, contexts and values that are essentially of the North. Whether they recognise it or not, the NGOs, the Red Cross movements and the UN agencies that comprise the humanitarian enterprise are increasingly part of the processes of global governance." (2007:159). This demonstrates an increasing tension between donors and some humanitarian organisations who may have traditionally viewed themselves as apolitical, but who are now being forced to compete for funding awarded on political grounds in order to maintain their activities.

Along with the increased politicization of aid, there has been, almost in tandem, an upsurge in the professionalization of the humanitarian sector. Barnett and Weiss argue that, “The professionalization of the sector and the attempt to retain highly valued staff and attract employees from the private sector has introduced familiar rewards into the contemporary humanitarian sector. Salaries, benefit packages and pensions have become competitive. Humanitarianism might not be a career like any other, but for many it is increasingly a profession as well as an avocation.” (2008:12). Considering these two trends in conjunction, aid is now considered by many to have become an industry. Claudia McGoldrick (2011) posits that, “Increased competition between humanitarian organisations is a reality. Aid has become an industry, with an increasingly crowded marketplace in terms of actors. The survival of many organisations depends on their capacity to engage the media, raise funds, and exert an influence on political players.” (2011:977). This point is echoed by Calhoun who states that “Humanitarian action has become a \$10 billion a year industry.” (2008:89). Vaux asserts that, “Aid agencies today are becoming contractors for governments.” (2001:204) and goes on to argue that unless aid agencies maintain the principles of humanity and impartiality and resist becoming tools for Western Governments and their foreign policy interests, “The pursuit of altruism will be lost. Aid will become a tool of self-interest.” (2001:204).

### **2.2.1 Politicization and Professionalization: mine action**

The proclaimed apolitical nature of many humanitarian and indeed mine action organisations represents, in the current climate, a somewhat naive stance. As Barnett and Weiss assert, “It is impossible for humanitarian agencies to be apolitical. Their actions have political consequences and they are viewed by those on the ground as political.” (2008:4). They go on to state that the insistence to treat humanitarianism and politics as two separate domains is a false dualism, as the boundaries between the two are socially constructed. They assert that rather than taking at face value the representations of aid organisations themselves in terms of politics and humanitarianism, it is instead better to assess critically the somewhat contradictory relationship that different organisations have when conceptualising humanitarianism and politics. Similarly within the mine action sector, the assertion that many organisations make to be apolitical is a misrepresentation of the lived reality of working within the humanitarian sphere.

In an article on the impact of remnants of war on land rights, Unruh and Corriveau-Bourque discuss a slightly different engagement with politics that is currently an extremely contentious

issue within the mine action sector - land release. They state that, "The desire for the mine action community to remain uninvolved with the politics of land can actually open the door for post-clearance conflict, and can also expose mine action organisations to aggression from local parties. Even though mine action organisations may wish to remain neutral, their roles are often perceived as distinctly political by local actors, especially when mines are removed from disputed areas." (2011:15). This point is voiced in somewhat more forcible terms as a key message in a briefing paper drafted by Unruh and Corriveau-Bourque for the GICHD which says that, "Mine action organisations are not neutral when it comes to land rights. Releasing land which was previously contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war and making it accessible changes its status. This inevitably involves land rights issues, even if the intent is to avoid them." (GICHD 2010:1). It can therefore be seen that proclaiming to take an apolitical stance is an unrealistic prospect in the current humanitarian context. Rather, a more critical analysis of the situation is needed that actively considers the different agendas that are being brought to the humanitarian table.

In terms of politicisation, similar to humanitarianism, within the mine action sector, Chapman (2010) asserts that mine action has become an industry and that demining and mine action programmes are being used to promote the political interests of certain groups. Taking a slightly different stance, Bolton argues that "Mine action is becoming a commodity to buy or an activity of counterinsurgency. To counteract these trends, we need a 'doctrine' of mine action that puts human welfare at its centre." (2010:179). Mine action, it can therefore be concluded, is becoming increasingly politicised. Where and when donors award funding, and who mine-free land should be released to are inherently political decisions meaning that it is no longer tenable for mine action organisations to remain neutral.

### **2.3 Accountability and impact assessment:**

The call to refocus humanitarianism and mine action upon its origins of alleviating the suffering of those most in need is a compelling argument. By striving to improve the situation of those most affected by war and natural disasters, it should therefore follow that humanitarians should be accountable to the people they are trying to assist. However, as Terry states, "For the most part, accountability to donors takes precedence over ensuring that target populations receive timely and appropriate humanitarian assistance and the negative consequences of humanitarian action are downplayed." (2002:229). With this in mind, if it is generally the donors that aid organisations seek to demonstrate impact to (Terry 2002) where is the downwards accountability to the local populations that is often seen as a key facet of the

rights-base approach? I would argue that the debate surrounding accountability is inherently linked to the increasing focus within the humanitarian sphere and more specifically mine action sector on measuring the impact of interventions, which has come about, to some extent, because of the professionalization of the sector. As Barnett & Weiss note, “There is now agreement that good intentions are not enough, if they ever were. Results matter.” (2008:5).

Considering accountability, Barnett & Weiss state that, “In the main, there are relatively few in-depth practitioner generated or scholarly analyses about the supposed beneficiaries of humanitarian action.” (2008:47). This then highlights an existing gap in the literature where, I argue, the voices of local people should reside, but very clearly do not. It also emphasizes an additional issue, the terminology used to describe local people, and indeed the way in which they are conceptualised within the humanitarian sphere. I would argue that the very language utilised by humanitarian organisations to describe local people is problematic, setting up a divide at the outset, a ‘them and us’ scenario that sets the humanitarian organisations as the experts and the local people as the passive victims waiting for external assistance.

The unequal relationship between the givers and receivers of aid is, as Mary Anderson (2008) contends, the subject of much debate among practitioners. She asserts that the terminology used to describe local people has pragmatic as well as ideological motives, and argues that the choice of terminology is designed to avoid being paternalistic or patronising. However, this is not always possible to achieve, and as Hyndman and De Alwis assert, “The term beneficiary is unproblematically mobilized in humanitarian and development discourse, but highlights the asymmetrical relationships within which ‘assistance’ is bestowed. Such forms of ‘gifting’ among unequals disempowers the recipients.” (2003:218). In addition, as an ALNAP report about participation in emergency settings asserts, “Humanitarian jargon includes terms that imply a certain amount of condescension towards the affected population and local stakeholders, such as ‘beneficiaries’, ‘the locals’ and ‘going down to the field’.” (2000:69). This then points to the need for a shift in thinking about the way local people are perceived and characterised. As Ramalingam *et al* contend, “One of the most important paradigm innovations called for in the sector is towards the aid recipient as an active consumer rather than a passive victim. While many agencies might support this in principle, the practice still appears to lag some way behind the accepted ideal.” (2009:40). While agreeing that there is a need to reconceptualise the way that local people are characterised, the term ‘consumer’ is problematic, as it implies that humanitarianism is as a form of business with suppliers and

consumers of aid, a corporate analogy that brings to question the underlying rationale behind the sector. Instead I contend that the term 'active agents' would be a better phrase to use in this context, as it implies that local people are making choices and finding ways to go about their daily lives, rather than just passively waiting for assistance to arrive.

If the ideal is to view local people as active agents this then points to the need for recognition of local knowledge, skills and strategies developed for coping in humanitarian settings prior to the arrival of external assistance. However, as Andrew Bonwick (2007) contends, in his exploration of the issue of protection in humanitarian situations, it is generally assumed that local people do not know how to protect themselves. He argues that little emphasis is placed by humanitarian organisations on building on local capacities and coping strategies and instead the focus is on implementing top-down solutions to situations which are new to them, but not to the local population. He states, "Current debate tends to suggest that protection of civilians is something 'done to' passive victims recipients of international largesse." (2007:89). He argues that the focus should instead be placed on recognising how local people already protect themselves during times of vulnerability and risk and that, "'Protection' is thus not a conversation conducted above the heads of those affected by conflict, but a process to support their daily lives. This understanding should be central to the protection work of humanitarian agencies." (2007:99).

Within humanitarianism increasing pressure is being placed on organisations to undertake more evidence based evaluations of their work and to consider both the positive and the negative impact that their actions have. However, how these evaluations are undertaken is a matter of concern. As Crisp (2000), in an article exploring the challenges facing the evaluation of humanitarian activities writes, there are several steps that could be taken to improve how these are undertaken. The first, he argues, is to incorporate different approaches and methodologies that engage both the people implementing the projects, as well as the intended aid recipients in a more consultative and participatory way. Secondly, he calls for a wider range of consultants to be utilised in evaluations, as he argues, it is "a field which tends to be dominated by a relatively small number of 'experts', a large proportion male, originating from the English-speaking world and from northern Europe. Both substantively and symbolically, it would be advantageous for this monopoly to be eroded." (2000:6). Finally, he encourages those involved in the evaluation of humanitarian activities to 'think outside the box'. He contends, "Such reviews [evaluations] can all too easily become technocratic assessments, which simply ask whether a project or programme is meeting its stated

objectives in an effective and efficient manner. Questions of a more fundamental nature – whether those objectives are the right ones, whether they correspond to the needs and aspirations of the beneficiaries and whether entirely different approaches to the situation or problem at hand should be considered – are all too easily neglected.” (2000:7). Evaluation can therefore be seen to be an evolving area in the field of humanitarianism that still requires development.

When considering the needs of local people, within humanitarianism there is a definite focus on the material. However, as Vaux asserts, “Humanity does not mean concern for physical wellbeing only. Aid that simply provides calories for the stomach or water for the throat is a reduction of people to things. How can there be human concern for such a mean objective? ‘Concern for the person’ entails concern for the whole being, including a person’s state of mind, sense of loss and the devaluation of life. The suffering of the body and the mind cannot be distinguished from each other. It is concern for every aspect of a person including their loss of relatives and, their way of life, their disability, their love of children, their past and their future. Humanitarian concern is a demanding concept because it has no limit.” (2001:8). It can therefore be seen that ensuring that more than just physical needs are being met is of key importance in humanitarian interventions.

### **2.3.1 Accountability and Impact Assessment: mine action literature**

Moving on to consider evaluation and impact assessment more specifically within the mine action sector, Harpviken and Skara argue that, “Humanitarian mine action like any other sector operating in conflict settings, needs to focus more strongly on building the capacity to analyse its impact on conflict and peace, and to ensure that the resultant analysis is used to improve existing practices.” (2003:820). Horwood (2003) echoes this point and asserts that although millions of pounds have been spent on research into new technologies for demining, which has resulted in very limited development of demining techniques, donors should consider funding further research to improve impact measures, which would result in improved prioritization of projects, and the needs of mine affected communities being met more effectively.

In a similar vein, the GICHD state that, “Study after study has decried the fact that, while there is abundant data detailing the number of landmines destroyed, the area of land cleared and the number of people receiving mine risk education (‘doing the job right’), there is little data allowing an assessment of whether these achievements have enhanced the well-being of people in mine-affected communities. Simply put, mine action practitioners often cannot

demonstrate that they are doing - or even aiming at - 'the right job'." (2005:13). The changing approach to the evaluation of mine action activities in recent years from outputs to outcomes has also been highlighted in the literature. Harpviken *et al* (2003) argue that mine action has re-orientated its focus from the number of mines cleared or amount of land contaminated to a more people-focused approach that emphasises how landmines affect a population, and the impact that mine action has on improving their wellbeing. Their article explores three impact assessment methods: Landmine Impact Surveys, economic analysis and community studies. They conclude that "no single approach provides the full answer to the need for impact assessment in mine action" (2003:905), but the real lesson that must be learnt is that it is imperative for the knowledge gained from impact assessments to be integrated into the decision making and implementation of projects and programmes in order to better focus the interventions and to make them more relevant for all stakeholders.

Goslin (2003) also highlights the need to explore alternative methods of impact assessment that are more relevant to the micro level. She states that the majority of impact assessments focus on the negative impact of landmines on populations, without including reference to the positive impact that mine action projects are having on affected communities. Similarly, Horwood (2003) further emphasises the importance of impact assessment of both mines on affected people and the success of mine action activities in reducing this impact, particularly at community level. He states, "The sector also needs to develop mechanisms for setting priorities and to establish methods for measuring and enhancing the impact of mine action. The linkages between research and data collection, as well as subsequent application, are crucial." (2003:939). The article's conclusion emphasises the need for more community-based and community sensitive indicators to measure the impact of mines, as well as the impact of mine action, in order to inform prioritization and planning. He goes on to state that "the greatest impact of mines and UXO is on the micro or community level, although in severely affected countries there may be hundreds of thousands of affected communities, with consequent implications for the nation as a whole." (2003:942). He also argues "in almost all cases, the understanding of the impact of mine action is poorly grasped, inadequately analysed and rarely measured at field level. The sector still struggles to include a rigorous socioeconomic, community-based orientation." (2003:944).

More recently, there has been an increasing amount of research on developing frameworks for assessing the impact of mine action activities. Massleberg (2010) in an article about one specific impact assessment tool begins by asking, in the words of Robert Chambers, whose



reality counts? Her article draws attention to the power relations at play in impact assessment, and argues that for mine action to be effective, it must take its lead from the needs of the affected communities, and that in keeping with this, these stakeholders should therefore have a voice in assessing how successful a project has been.

## **2.4 Humanitarianism and Development:**

For many years there has been a debate surrounding where humanitarianism ends and development begins. Feardon argues that, "The key distinction between 'humanitarian relief' as opposed to 'development aid' is the idea of response to emergencies as opposed to attempts to improve the normal state of affairs. Emergencies are 'sudden', 'abnormal', cause widespread suffering and often involve refugees." (2008:51). But, in the case of many mine affected people, what if the emergency becomes the normal state of affairs? As Vigh (2008) contends, for those people around the world suffering from poverty, social marginalisation and conflict, crisis is not a singular event, but instead is a constant state - crisis as context. Landmines are seen as immediate threats to the safety and security of people in certain contexts and therefore mine clearance in these situations falls under the humanitarian banner. However the crisis created by landmines is not always short-lived, as mines can stay undetected under the ground for years. For those people who have lived with the continual presence of mines for a prolonged period, mine action takes place in a developmental setting, long after conflict has ceased.

The divide between humanitarianism and development has been the subject of discussion by Hugo Slim. He asserts that it is an unhelpful dichotomy that shrouds the fact that both activities are short and long term, are concerned with saving lives and are inherently political and states that, "The idea that there is an implicit distinction in the values between humanitarianism and development, which is encouraged by relief-development dualism, is misconceived. Poverty and violence both proceed from a common root in a human nature which finds sharing profoundly difficult, and a tendency to dehumanize the 'otherness' in potential rivals all too easy." (2000:492). He goes on to argue that by adopting a rights-based approach to both humanitarianism and development, this dualism can be dissolved as everyone would be working towards the same transformative agenda. However, this argument is not without its critics and as Fiona Fox states, "While long-term development aid has always been conditional, humanitarian relief was ostensibly unconditional and based only on the level of need. The introduction of human rights conditionalities into humanitarian relief has already left people in need without aid." (2001:283-284).

It can therefore be seen that the distinction between humanitarianism and development has been made for a reason: to separate the more political rights-based agenda from the morally all-encompassing needs approach. However, as these boundaries have become ever more opaque, it is now time to reconsider humanitarianism, perhaps instead as a starting point for development, particularly in post-conflict settings which begins with emergency relief before transforming into longer term development goals. This would require greater communication between humanitarian and development workers, and a more equitable funding mechanism for the continuation of activities that morph from humanitarian to developmental. Perhaps in the future, as a sector straddling both humanitarianism and development, mine action could act as a pioneer in bridging the gap between both sectors? As such, I will now explore how mine action is now being linked to the broader developmental agenda.

#### **2.4.1 Mine action and development:**

Integrating mine action and development is also a contentious issue within the mine action sector. Horwood argues that “In terms of the scope of its intentions, mine action only aims to return land to communities in a non-contaminated state and does not seek to address other developmental or social issues. This is a potential weakness of pursuing an ‘isolated intervention’: mine action disengaged from development and socio-political contexts.” (2003: 943). This has been recognised as a weakness of the sector, which has now put the integration of mine action and development firmly on the agenda. However, there are difficulties in implementing this combined approach. As Unruh *et al* argue, “mine action organisations do not always have well-established links and coordination with the wider humanitarian and development sector for several reasons. In the past, they have tended to view mine contamination as a disarmament or humanitarian issue, but in many countries it is also a development issue. Most mine action programs were established in response to humanitarian emergencies or conflict, and mine action actors have problems changing focus from humanitarian mine action (designed to save life and limbs) to the provision of mine clearance services in support of reconstruction and development.” (2011:59). They go on to assert that as mine action actors have been predominantly focused on clearing mines in order to minimize the number of accidents and injuries, less focus has been placed on broader issues pertaining to livelihood and development post-clearance. This then points to the need for a certain degree of institutional learning on the part of mine action organisations as an integrated approach would require an analysis of both long and short-term needs of affected populations. This counters the somewhat simplistic rationale of the sector to get mines out of the ground,

and would instead necessitate spending more time consulting and engaging with local communities about their needs and priorities. In doing so mine action organisations would gain a broader depth of knowledge of the situation of local people.

If development is defined as “an effort to increase the well-being of people who are in some way impoverished in the things that both sustain life and make it worth living” (Maslen 2004: 103), then clearing contaminated land of mines and explosive remnants of war is a key facet of post-conflict recovery. A commitment to development and wellbeing is explicitly outlined in Article 14 of the 2009 Cartagena Declaration<sup>5</sup>, which states “ We will ensure that all efforts to implement the Convention will involve young and old, women and men, girls and boys, and reflect their views. The dignity and well-being of survivors, their families and communities will be at the core of our efforts” (UN 2009). However, as the GICHD note, “Donors have stressed for several years the importance of linking mine action into broader development activities, and this remains a major challenge for the discipline.” (2010:33). This then reveals that while in principle it is agreed that mine action should be linked to development, the practicalities of implementing such a combined approach have not yet been established. However, as the GICHD (2008) note, it is likely that funding for stand alone mine action will decrease year on year, as donors pursue a more integrated approach to meeting the needs of mine-affected people. As a result there is increasing pressure on mine action organisations to co-ordinate their activities with those of development agencies in order to ensure that monies for future projects can be secured.

The GICHD guidelines on linking mine action and development state that by integrating mine action with development activities “a more coherent response to community safety and livelihood promotion” (2008:15) can be achieved, and that “While difficult to quantify, the developmental impacts of mine action include safe roads, improved access and provision of health care, education and other social services as well as safe access and productive use of land intended for resettlement/housing, agriculture, grazing and forest land. Indirect developmental impacts include; fewer deaths and injuries; increased availability of labour, skills and knowledge as a result of fewer accidents; improved sense of security; safe access to

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<sup>5</sup> The Cartagena Declaration was the result of an international summit held in Colombia reviewing the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on Their Destruction that resulted in State Parties (who are signatories) reconfirming their commitment to reducing the suffering caused by landmines and working towards achieving a mine-free world.

land, infrastructure, markets and social services; improved income levels, living standards and funds available for economic investment; and reduced burden placed on the health care system.” (GICHD 2008:15). This reveals a conceptualisation of development predominantly in material and economic terms. However, I would argue that by adopting a more holistic approach to wellbeing that incorporates not only the material aspects of peoples’ lives, but also relational and subjective dimensions, greater understanding of the multiple ways that mines impact on communities can be offered.

Developing the argument for the integration of mine action and development, Kjellman *et al* (2003) state, “Aside from the obvious physical dangers posed by landmine contamination, landmines represent a barrier to both long term development efforts and to short term emergency interventions. In the absence of a carefully designed and integrated overarching programme, the threat from landmines blunts effective humanitarian responses in complex emergencies and thwarts the impact of long term development initiatives.”(2003:855). They assert that there is a greater need for cooperation between mine action and development actors in order to ensure that the needs of affected populations are met. They state that “Coordination bodies have often been unable to reconcile the disparate goals and strategies actors have, and at times have proven rigid, reluctant or simply unable to adapt to the changing needs of dynamic contexts... Within HMA and other sectors of humanitarian assistance, the net outcome has been the ineffective delivery of assistance and wasted resources.” (2003:856). This, I contend, could be remedied in part by greater engagement with mine-affected communities who would be able to inform the mine action actors about their changing needs and priorities.

Downs (2009) also highlights the lack of coordination between the wider development community and mine action actors and posits, “The ability of mine action to have a positive impact on development depends on its success at facilitating the actions or anticipating the needs of development actors.” (2009). His research focuses on a project aimed at enhancing the use of mine-action information by non-mine-action actors. This research aims to map the various organisations that can benefit from information about landmines and UXO gathered by the mine sector, with the aim of providing a more holistic approach to reconstruction and development through sharing information. This Downs argues, will assist the mine action community in better understanding the needs of development actors.

The integration of mine action and development can therefore be seen as an important part of

the future of the sector, and also the wider humanitarian and development agenda. Communication and co-ordination are key concepts in achieving this end, as indeed, is greater consultation and consideration of local people and communities. While community liaison activities that seek to engage with local people in order to identify and prioritise mine action and clearance needs have now become an accepted part of mine action practice, the extent to which this information is realistically used is open to question. Bearing in mind that mine action remains the preserve of ex-forces personnel who tend to be quite technocratic, and goal orientated, the voices, needs and concerns of local populations often go unheard, meaning that mine action becomes once again about landmines, rather than reducing the impact that mines have on people. It is only when local people are placed at the centre of interventions, from design right through to evaluation and linked to wider development activities that the true needs of affected people will be met.

## **2.5 Concluding Thoughts:**

This chapter has reviewed the humanitarian and mine action literature in order to answer four questions: what is the nature of the mine action sector and how is it structured? What is the ethos underpinning the sector? How are local people conceptualised within the literature? And what challenges does the sector face as it strives to improve the lives and wellbeing of mine-affected people? In answering these questions, this chapter contextualises mine action and provides the backdrop for discussions in Chapter 6 about the factors influencing and shaping the way that mine action actors conceptualise mine contamination and the effect that this has on the wellbeing of local people.

The literature reveals that the humanitarian, and indeed, mine action sectors are crowded market places full of different actors with different agendas. Humanitarianism is changing, and there has been an increase in both the politicization and professionalization of the sector, resulting in a veritable aid industry that is now focused on addressing the previously under-represented area of accountability and impact assessment. It is clear that organisations are now walking a thin line between meeting the needs of local people while ensuring that donor criteria and institutional mandates are being observed. This has resulted in humanitarianism becoming a profession as well as a vocation, which is shaped as Donini (2007) asserts predominantly by Western thinking. In this way, while mine action and humanitarianism are designed to alleviate the suffering of people in need, they are structured in such a way that only limited regard is given to local understandings and responses to emergency situations. Local people are vicariously viewed as either invisible, distant 'others', victims, beneficiaries or

passive recipients within the humanitarian and mine action literature. This paints a negative portrait, which I contend, points to the need for a re-conceptualisation of local people as active agents in their own lives. Local people need to have their voices not only heard, but heeded (Bottomley 2003), if future humanitarian and mine action interventions are to truly meet the needs of people affected by conflict and remnants of war. This prompted me to seek out both mine action and local villager perceptions of landmine impact in my research for two reasons. Firstly because I wanted to provide a space for local mine-affected people to tell their stories and share their experiences of living with landmines, presenting them as active agents in their own lives. Secondly, I wanted to be able to compare and contrast the different conceptualisations of landmine impact. In doing so I bridge a gap in the institutional knowledge of mine action and deepen the understanding of the ways that landmines affect the lives and wellbeing of local people.

Discussing moralities and motivations has allowed for an insight into the way in which the humanitarian sphere operates and the driving force for many of its activities. While the underlying rationale behind humanitarianism has been to alleviate the suffering of those in need, aid organisations and mine action agencies are increasingly becoming involuntarily involved in the politics of aid as donors award funding to further their own political interests. Humanitarians and mine action actors can therefore no longer view themselves as neutral and apolitical, as in reality they are deeply embedded in and influenced by the wider institutional system that has become increasingly politicised. This points to humanitarianism and mine action being sectors in transition.

While humanitarianism has had a broad mandate to alleviate suffering, in contrast, the mine action sector has been focused on removing landmines from the ground, a narrow mandate that fails to consider the broader effects that the presence of mines has on the lives of local people. This is increasingly being recognised as a weakness of the sector and mine action organisations are facing growing demands to demonstrate their effectiveness at improving the lives and wellbeing of affected people. In addition, it has also resulted in donors placing more pressure on mine action organisations to integrate their activities with development agencies in order to more effectively meet the needs of local people, which remains a challenge for the mine action sector. But what is the situation of mine-affected people in Cambodia? And what shapes Khmer understandings of wellbeing? The following chapter considers these questions by exploring the Cambodian context as the setting for my fieldwork.



### **Chapter Three: The Cambodian Context**

Cambodia has a bloody and violent past that has shaped the way the country is today. The Khmer Rouge (KR) period (1975-1979) decimated the fabric of Cambodian society as Pol Pot forcibly implemented his vision of an idyllic rural utopia. All schools were closed, religion was banned, families were torn apart, educated people were executed and urban dwellers were expelled from towns and cities as everyone was forced out into the countryside to work as farmers. The brutality of the regime resulted in the deaths of over a million people and bred a culture of violence and mistrust that fundamentally changed the structure of Khmer social relations. More than thirty years on, the legacy of the KR and subsequent struggle to rid the country of the regime are still in evidence, physically and socially. As legacies of war, landmines still contaminate Cambodia, the result of offensive and defensive strategies of KR, Government and Vietnamese forces, and the country remains one of the most mine-affected in the world.

The aim of this chapter is three-fold. The first aim is to document the events that led to Cambodia being one of the most mine-contaminated countries in the world, and how these have shaped present day Khmer society. The second aim of the chapter is to ascertain what shapes wellbeing for Cambodian people. By exploring the political, religious, cultural and social systems in the country with particular reference to rural people, I offer an insight into the relationships that people have with others and the surrounding environment. In doing so, I identify what Khmer culture values for life to be good. The third aim is to contextualise the setting of my fieldwork by detailing the current landmine situation in Cambodia, and subsequent response to this by the mine action sector. By exploring the second and third aims, I present the backdrop for discussions in Chapter 7 of the way that landmine impact is experienced and understood by Khmer people and how their wellbeing is affected by the presence of these remnants of war.

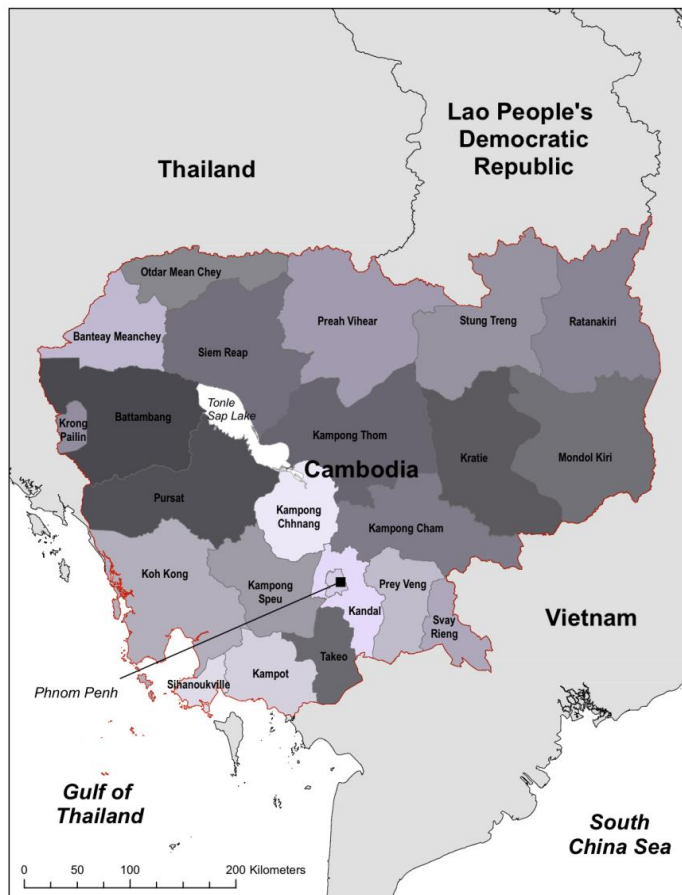
The chapter begins with a brief description of the geographical location and features of Cambodia before moving on to explore the country's history. From there I move on to consider present day Khmer society by exploring the political situation of the country, the way relationships are structured in Cambodia, the importance of religion and spirituality and socioecological relations for rural people. This frames Khmer understandings of wellbeing and leads on to the final section of the chapter, which documents the landmine situation in



Cambodia, and the development of mine action to combat this problem in order to improve the lives of affected people.

### 3.1 The Geography of Cambodia:

Figure 1: Map of Cambodia

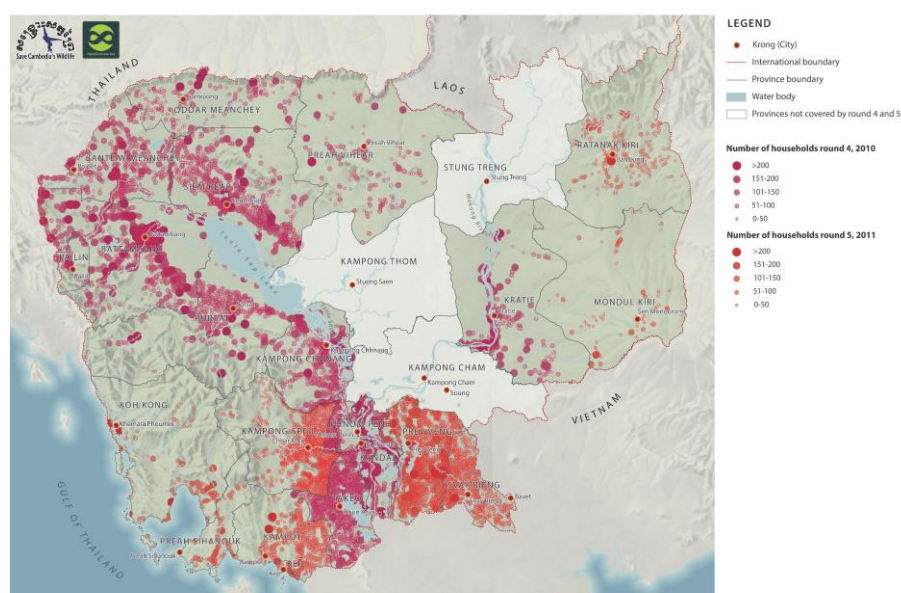


Source: Landmine Monitor 2015

Cambodia is situated in South East Asia, and shares borders with Thailand, Vietnam and Laos. Geographically, it has a total area of 181,035 square kilometres, and is divided into 23 provinces, and one municipality, which is the capital city of Phnom Penh. The country has a population of approximately 14 million, of which, 22 percent live in urban areas (UNDP 2014). The majority of the population work in agriculture (59.1%) with rice the dominant crop grown, exports of which amount to 29 percent of the country's GDP. The remaining population work in industry, predominantly in garment and shoe manufacturing, exports of which total 29% of GDP, and the service sector, including telecommunications and tourism, which account for 39% of GDP (US CIA 2010).

Recognised as one of the poorest countries in the world, Cambodia is ranked 137th out of 182 countries on the UN Human Development Index, and 85<sup>th</sup> out of 135 nations on the UN Human Development Poverty Index. It is estimated that 35 percent of the total population live in poverty, the majority of whom are found in rural areas (UNDP 2009). The map below details the distribution of poor households across Cambodia in 2010 and 2011, which is drawn from data from the Identification of Poor Households Programme run by the Cambodian Ministry of Planning.<sup>6</sup> The increasing inequality between the rural and urban populations has been highlighted as a major concern (UNICEF 2014), and the Cambodian Government is committed to developing the country as a whole, as outlined in the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (Royal Government of Cambodia 2014).

Figure 2: Map of distribution of poor households in Cambodia 2010-2011



Source: Open Development Cambodia

Before beginning a more in-depth analysis of the situation in present day Cambodia, it is first necessary to explore the country's history in order to understand the events that have shaped present day Khmer society, and the socio-political landscape in which this research is situated.

<sup>6</sup> Appendix 1 details the indicators used to identify poor households in the programme

### **3.2 The History of Cambodia:**

As Heder and Ledgerwood note, “For three hundred years, the territory that is now Cambodia has experienced repeated episodes of local violence, external control, and severe isolation, a fate David Chandler has called the tragedy of Cambodian history.” (1996:3). Chandler (1991, 1996) has written extensively on Khmer history, and much of the following draws from his work as well as the contents of two books written about the landmine problem in Cambodia by Davies and Dunlop (1994) and Stover (1991), unless otherwise referenced.

The Kingdom of Angkor was established in 802 AD by Jayavarman II, and from the tenth to the thirteenth century, was a powerful presence in South East Asia, extending its territory into what is now modern day Vietnam, Malaysia, Burma and Laos (Davies & Dunlop 1994). However, in the 1400s the empire began to decline, and the territory was slowly eroded by Angkor’s increasingly expansionist neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam to approximately the size of modern day Cambodia today. During this period, the leader of the Angkor Empire was reduced to siding with whichever of these forces would offer the best terms in order to protect its people from persecution and death. There is little doubt that the situation would have worsened, and ironically Cambodia as a nation may not have existed today without the intervention of the French, who were committed to expanding their colonial empire following the colonisation of Vietnam earlier in the century. As Chandler notes, “The colonial era began without a shot and in a very tentative way.” (1996:141), with a protectorate being established in exchange for access to timber and mineral exploration rights.

In 1941 the French appointed the young Prince Norodom Sihanouk as king of the territory, a man who became, as Davies and Dunlop note, “...the most important political personality of the following half-century of Cambodian history.” (1994: 4). Just over a decade later, in 1954, independence from the French was achieved, and the Kingdom of Cambodia was born, headed by the constitutional monarch, Sihanouk. However, the following year, Sihanouk abdicated from the throne in order to enter politics directly, and his father became king. It was at this time that a variety of political parties were established, all vying for power, which, in 1963, ultimately resulted in a group of radicals leaving Phnom Penh to establishing an insurgent group that would later become the Khmer Rouge.

Throughout the 1960s, when the Cold War was at its height, there were increasing tensions across the region. The US began its campaign against the communist Vietnamese, some of whom fled into Cambodia. Despite Cambodia’s neutrality, the Ho Chi Minh trail that carried

supplies from North Vietnam to rebel forces was established within Cambodian territory, and this resulted in 1969, in a secret bombing campaign by the US aimed at flushing out the rebels. This devastating campaign continued until 1973 when the US Congress learned of the extent of the operation and called a halt to it. During this time over half a million bombs were dropped on Cambodia (Davies & Dunlop 1994), and more than 150,000 civilians were killed.

In the meantime, the political situation in Cambodia was in turmoil, and in 1970 Prince Sihanouk was deposed by Prime Minister Lon Nol in a coup that was supported by the US Government, the Khmer Republic was established, and the Vietnamese were ordered to leave the country. Simultaneously, the deposed Sihanouk formed an alliance with the Khmer Rouge, a movement that grew rapidly in the coming years. It was at this time that Cambodia became embroiled in a destructive civil war that resulted in the displacement of millions of Cambodians, as the communist forces took greater control of rural areas.

After the 1973 Paris Agreements ended US involvement in the Vietnam war, US financial support for Lon Nol declined, and his days as Prime Minister were numbered. On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1975 the Khmer Rouge took control of the capital city, Phnom Penh, led by Brother Number 1, Pol Pot (Ledgerwood *et al* 1994). They renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea, and sought to completely transform the country into an egalitarian agrarian state by systematically destroying all evidence of previous Khmer life. All schools were closed, religion was banned, temples destroyed, books were burned, city dwellers were forced out into the country into rural communes to work the land and monks, scholars and the bourgeois classes were executed to make way for the new order.

The Khmer Rouge were responsible for what is widely recognised as being one of the most brutal genocides of the modern day world. As Davies and Dunlop state, "During the three and a half years of the regime, over 1 million Cambodians died from hunger, overwork, disease and routine executions for the smallest 'offences'." (1994:6). Children were seen as the future, and were encouraged to inform on their parents. Families were torn apart, and terror and fear became the norm. As Colletta and Cullen state, "...all social, political and economic institutions were destroyed and a war against the class system was waged." (2000:26).

Although relatively short lived, the Khmer Rouge period effectively devastated Cambodia, and has significantly impacted on the way that Khmer society has evolved into its present day incarnation. Cambodians who lived through the experience state that although it was a

relatively short period, it seemed endless at the time (Ledgerwood et al 1994). In effect, this period of Cambodian history included “systematic attacks on traditional Cambodian society – on norms, culture, religion, organisations, networks and even the family. Community and family members were encouraged to spy and report on each other, destroying trust and planting the seeds of deeply rooted fear.” (Colletta & Cullen 2000:26)

The Khmer Rouge controlled the country for three and a half years, and during that time it was completely isolated from the rest of the world. However, in 1978 the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia with a 120,000 strong army, and in the following year took control of Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge fled to the borders of Thailand, but supported by a secret Thai-Chinese agreement, continued to battle against the invading Vietnamese army. Many thousands of Cambodian people fled to refugee camps on the Thai border to escape from the intense fighting between the occupying force and the guerrilla factions. A massive international aid programme was instituted on the Thai-Khmer border led by UNICEF and World Food Program that attracted yet more refugees to the border, as famine and starvation continued to be rife within Cambodia. During the conflicts, all parties laid mines, offensively and defensively. As Stover notes, “For all parties to the Cambodian conflict, the main purpose of laying landmines had been to limit military operations by enemy forces: to deny the opposite side access to bridges, roads or strategic installations or to protect one’s own forces from attack.” (1991: 34). This resulted in layer upon layer of unmapped mine fields across the country, concentrated in the north-west of Cambodia, particularly along the border with Thailand.

Three main Khmer factions controlled the camps on the border, each maintaining their own army: Sihanouk led the United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), Son Sann, a former prime minister from the Lon Nol era, became the head of non-Communist Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF), and the Khmer Rouge. But it was not only a war that was waged on Khmer soil, as Cambodia continued to be a pawn in an international power struggle between Cold War factions. Despite widespread condemnation of the genocide, Democratic Kampuchea, and the government of the Khmer Rouge retained Cambodia’s seat in the United Nations until 1982. It was only when a hastily formed coalition party, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), established by Sihanouk, Son Sann and a Khmer Rouge commander Khieu Samphan received support from China and the ASEAN nations, that Cambodia’s seat on the United Nations was transferred from the Khmer Rouge. However, as Stover notes, “The CGDK was a tactical, if uneasy alliance, a diplomatic fiction useful for opposing the Vietnamese installed People’s

Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). As a coalition, it neither exercised governmental authority inside Cambodia, nor did it have a headquarters or a common constitution.” (1991:27).

From 1979 to 1982, emergency relief was provided to Cambodia by UN agencies who were permitted to operate from Vietnamese controlled Phnom Penh. However, despite the devastating consequences wrought on the Khmer population during the Khmer Rouge years, the same amount of aid (300 million US dollars) was spent assisting the 6.5 million remaining Khmer population, as it was on the 300,000 refugees living on the border (Stover 1991). From 1982 onwards, although aid was maintained to the refugees, the international community completely withdrew financial assistance to Cambodia, which became the only developing nation in the world to be denied UN development aid despite the obvious need for relief efforts following the war years of the 1970’s and the Khmer rouge period (Davies & Dunlop 1994). The international isolation of Cambodia during this time is well documented, particularly by Mysliwiec (1998) in an Oxfam publication entitled “Punishing the Poor”, which berates the international community for abandoning a population in dire need of assistance purely on political grounds.

By 1989, with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, Vietnam was no longer financially able to support its presence in Cambodia, and withdrew its forces. The government of the newly named State of Cambodia (SOC) collapsed, and resistance forces swarmed across the border from Thailand, which resulted in the intensification of fighting within Cambodia for the ensuing two years. Hun Sen, the prime minister of the SOC was left little choice but to accept the terms being offered by the international community to assist in mediating the end of the war in Cambodia, and in 1991, the Paris Peace Accords were signed by the four warring factions who agreed to cease hostilities and demobilize their armies. What followed was an unprecedented degree of control being permitted to the United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC), who stepped in to run the country for an interim period of 18 months while democratic elections could be organised. United Nations Peace Keeping Forces moved in to Cambodia to act as a deterrent to re-establishing hostilities, and international aid began to pour into the country. The Khmer Rouge, however, refused to demobilize and launched their first attack against UN forces in January 1993 (Davies & Dunlop 1994).

Elections began in May 1993, in spite of Khmer Rouge threats to boycott and disrupt the process. Fortified polling stations allowed safe access to voting for the Khmer population, and after five days the results were announced. No one party had received a majority share of the

votes, and a compromise was forced between FUNCINPEC and the Cambodian's People's Party (CPP) composed of members of the former SOC government. Cambodia adopted a new constitution and reverted to a kingdom, with Sihanouk as the head of state, thus becoming a multi-party democracy under a constitutional monarchy. The elections were considered to be free and fair by the UN, who then began their withdrawal from the country.

In the decades that followed, relative peace has reigned in Cambodia, and the long process of post-conflict reconstruction and development has begun. Hun Sen remains the prime minister of the country, and Norodom Sihamoni is now the King of Cambodia, following his father's abdication in 2004 (CIA 2010). However, the legacy of conflict and isolation remains a considerable barrier to development in the country. Landmines and ERW exacerbate an already difficult situation, and much work still remains to be done before Cambodia's infrastructure is restored.

### **3.3 Present Day Cambodian Society:**

As it can be seen, Cambodia has a particularly violent and bloody past, and although the country is arguably a "relative failure in terms of post-conflict development" (Verkoren 2005:289), stability has now been achieved. As Zimmer *et al* note, "Today, Cambodia is emerging from a long period of isolation from most of the rest of the world, and only recently have data to examine social, economic, and demographic conditions within the country, including its older population, become available." (2006:355-356). This highlights the difficulties that researchers have faced in accurately documenting everyday life in Cambodia, although there is a growing body of literature that is focusing on a variety of aspects of daily life at the micro and meso levels, which this chapter will now explore.

### **3.4 Politics in Cambodia:**

Despite the instigation of a democratic system of governance by UNTAC following the 1991 Paris Peace Accords (PPA) and subsequent elections held regularly since 1993, questions remain about the nature of democracy in Cambodia. In a 2001 article, Caroline Hughes asks if Cambodia is a democracy or a dictatorship, and Kheang Un, in 2011 queries whether or not the country is moving away from democracy. Un argues that, "The overall quality of democracy in Cambodia has declined, evolving from unstructured competitive authoritarianism toward an authoritarianism characterized by the presence of a stable hegemonic party system." (2011: 546). Un (2011) goes on to argue that freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, two of

the main criteria underpinning democracy, have been severely curbed under the current political regime.

How then, could the political situation in Cambodia best be described? Caroline Hughes, who has written extensively on the political economy of Cambodia (2003, 2009) notes that “Militarization, elitism, charismatic leadership and the everyday use of violence for economic and political gain have been the hallmarks of Cambodian democracy throughout the 1990’s.” (2003:3). This is further supported by Un who argues that, “Despite the façade of democracy, Cambodia has continued to be influenced by historically entrenched patrimonial practices that undermine formal democratic institutions.” (2011:547). The nature of democracy, and state-society relations in Cambodia are therefore called into question. Although regular elections have been held in the country which have been viewed as ‘credible’ by the international community (Hughes 2009), there is unease about the way that Cambodia is governed by Hun Sen and the CPP. As Hughes notes, “Problems include patently un-liberal and undemocratic government attitudes, including tolerance of rampant corruption and intolerance of political dissent, top-down policy-making which marginalizes the poor, and concomitant, or perhaps subsequent, failures to alleviate poverty.” (2009:31). However, as Un argues, despite the relative failure of democracy in Cambodia, “Many democratic ideas – rule of law, accountability, transparency, human rights, equity – which were absent prior to the 1993 PPA have taken root in Cambodia. Therefore, it is imperative for the international community through its continued involvement to ensure the continuing presence of this democratic discourse, however limited.” (2011:560).

Richmond and Franks (2007) observe that high levels of corruption are widely acknowledged as the main reason for the lack of a fully developed democratic system of governance and the paralysis of civil society in Cambodia. They state that, “In terms of good governance, the democratic process is clearly being interfered with, corruption is rife, and the general population has little agency, politically, economically or socially, other than in limited and very localised contexts.” (2007:36). They go on to argue that despite the Government’s recognition of the problem of corruption in the country, and its efforts to counteract it, “Endemic corruption – or the Western understanding of it – is at the core of Cambodia’s hierarchical socio-political framework. This is constructed and operated on a feudal basis, at the heart of which is the patron-client relationship propagated by elites.” (Richmond & Franks 2007:38). Corruption is an issue even in the remote setting of the village where I undertook my



fieldwork, which has an important bearing upon landmine action and the outcome of such activities, a subject that will be discussed in Chapter 7.

In an overview of Cambodia in 2007, Hughes notes that the CPP remains more powerful than ever with major investment from China, as well as from Western donors. However, she notes that: "The party presides over a society in which inequality, landlessness, and alienation are rising. The government's response has been a combination of co-optation and the mobilisation of a menacing political climate of suppression." (2008:74). I would argue that little has changed in the present day, and the CPP, and Hun Sen maintain a stranglehold on Cambodia, although the elections in 2013 did see a marked increase in support for the opposition parties, in particular Sam Rainsy and the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), which won 55 seats, as opposed to the 68 of the CPP. However, the election was marred with allegations of voting irregularities, and the CNRP threatened to boycott the opening session of parliament unless an independent investigation into the elections were held, as they argued that they may have won the election if it had been free and fair. In addition, many Cambodians took to the streets of Phnom Penh to protest, and while these demonstrations were initially peaceful, the situation deteriorated into violence, with one man being shot in the head and killed, and numerous others being seriously injured in clashes with the police. This supports Un's (2011) assertion that while overt physical violence has been, for the main part, superseded by a more subtle form of political suppression, "The ruling CPP has employed the subordinate judiciary to suppress the media from criticising the government, to prevent civil society organisations from protecting the poor and articulating alternative discourses, and opposition parties from voicing criticisms. These developments, coupled with CPP's use of patronage-based material inducements, prevent opposition parties from winning future elections." (2011:547).

The endemic corruption and hierarchical relationships that dominate everyday life support Ledgerwood's (2007) argument that no one is considered equal to anyone else in Khmer society. Coupled with the suppression of the media, and the subtle oppression of the electorate by the CPP, it can be seen that democracy, universal human rights and equity in Cambodia have a long journey ahead. This then paints a picture of the present political situation in Cambodia, which I argue is a form of coercive democracy, whereby Hun Sen and the CPP maintain power through manipulation, oppression and coercion, under a thinly veiled pretence of a democratic system of governance that has gained a degree of legitimisation and (limited) credibility with the international community, thereby ensuring continued investment as well as aid from Western donors.

### 3.5 Khmer Culture and Society:

In an anthropological study of conflict management in Cambodia, Luco explores how the legacy of the past is influencing modern day Khmer culture. He argues that, "Behind the façade of a somewhat modern capital, Cambodian society remains fundamentally rural and traditional. Eroded as they might be, the old traditional values still hold fast." (2002:14). These values form the basis of a hierarchical patriarchal structure of society, where power, respect and maintaining face remain the key values underpinning social relationships. As Oveson *et al* note, "All social relations are hierarchically ordered. The hierarchy is primarily expressed in terms of age. An 'elder' (*bong*) is a person who has authority through his/her higher social status. Such status is not exclusively a function of chronological age, but is determined as the sum total of a number of dimensions including - apart from chronological age - gender, wealth, knowledge, reputation of the family, political position, employment, the character of the individual, and religious piety." (1996:34). Ledgerwood (2007) posits that this is similar to other countries in the region, and this highly compartmentalised and hierarchical structure is reflected not only by the behaviour of individuals towards one another, but also in the Khmer language, which mirrors the hierarchy by using terms of address dependent upon the relevant social status of the individual. In addition, Khmer society is based around unequal patron-client relationships, where poorer more dependent people court powerful and influential people. While the patron assists the client by using their power and influence, the client provides local support to the patron, and smaller services. As Ledgerwood notes, "The client is protected and assured a minimum level of subsistence. The patron in turn has followers, who serve to increase his power." (2007:1)

Also central to Cambodian culture are the concepts of face, honour and respect. As Hinton asserts, "The concept of Cambodian 'face' (*much, much moat*) can be roughly defined as a sociocentric self-image that is based on evaluations of others and shifts along an axis of honour and shame." (1998:101). Face, then is the way a person presents themselves to the world and, and is sensitive to insult as it represents external manifestations of dignity and personality (French 1994). Despite the concept of Cambodian 'face' being a significant feature of Khmer society, Hinton argues that very little research has been undertaken on the subject. He goes on to state that, "Given the strong cultural emphasis on avoiding shame, however, almost all Cambodians are extremely concerned with maintaining face. In fact, social interactions are structured in such a manner as to buffer people from losing face." (Hinton 1998:102). French (1994), in a study of amputee refugees in a camp on the Thai-Cambodian border emphasises

the importance of 'face', and documents how a perceived loss of face was the underlying cause for the numerous violent confrontations and disputes that took place in the camp. This points to the need to understand not only the specific place within the hierarchy of Khmer society that a person holds, but also to heed and acknowledge the subtle nuances of social relations and the way in which dignity is portrayed and maintained on a day-to-day basis.

In a book on Cambodian culture, Ebihara *et al* (1994) explore the ways that Khmer society has changed since the Khmer Rouge period through a collection of essays written by both Khmer and non-Khmer scholars, and although written in the 1990s, it is arguably still one of the most in-depth pieces of research available on Khmer culture today. They argue that, "Although changes within Cambodia have yet to be studied in depth, certain facts suggest that new patterns of social relations have emerged. For example, demographic shifts due to twenty years of warfare resulted in an adult population that is in some areas up to 70 percent female (Boua 1981, 1982). This shift has brought about changes in marriage and residence patterns, as well as in the role of women in the workplace (Sonnois 1990; UNICEF 1990; Ledgerwood 1992)." (Ledgerwood *et al* 1994:3-4). However, although notable changes have taken place, many of the societal norms in Cambodia are influenced by traditional codes of conduct or rules of behaviour. As Luco notes, "Certain patterns regulating proper social behaviour and some implicit rules governing life in society can be found in oral and written references such as legends, treatises on morality...These references were still passed from generation to generation until the war in 1970, but the younger generation is now much less familiar with them. Nonetheless, they still shape the behavioural patterns regulating relations between parent and child, husband and wife, people of high social standing and the lower classes." (2002:20).

One of the most prominent moral treatises utilised in Khmer society are the *Chb'ab Srei* or rules for women, which are still taught as part of the Junior School curriculum. The *Chb'ab Srei* dictates that women should walk quietly, be subservient to men, and should remain at home in order to care for children and to be homemakers. Indeed, if one considers family relationships, the social unit in Cambodia remains the nuclear family consisting of father, mother and children all living under the same roof (Luco 2002). Within the family, social ranking is dependent upon birth order and sex (Ledgerwood 2007), with men being afforded a higher social status than women, and children taught to be respectful and obedient to their elders. Women are seen as carers, while men are seen as providers for the family. However, there is an increasing tension between the traditional roles ascribed to men and women, and

more modern roles that are now emerging due to the neoliberal policies that the government is pursuing. These policies have resulted in increasing numbers of women joining the workforce in sectors such as the garment manufacturing industry.

In an article on domestic violence in Cambodia, Eng *et al* (2010) argue that the way traditional Khmer society is structured has led to a tolerance of domestic violence. However, changes to traditional gendered roles are now being challenged by more egalitarian behaviours and attitudes, which has resulted in an increase in domestic violence rates. They go on to assert that much domestic violence is a result of men attempting to exert power over women, in order to maintain their positions of authority and dominance. This has serious implications for Khmer society, and as Brickell notes, “Domestic violence is persistently identified as having increased in scope and intensity in the aftermath of Pol Pot’s reign and is now considered to represent the major challenge for Cambodia to reach its targets of promoting gender equality in the Millennium Development Goals (Ministry of Planning 2005).” (2008:1667). What is clear then, is that Khmer society is changing, and although hierarchy, patron-client relations and paternalism still dominate everyday life, it can be argued that the interpretation of macro level policies at the micro level has resulted in an increasing level of tension between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ values that underpin social relationships.

Understanding the nature of Cambodian culture is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it mediated the way that I behaved and interacted with people when undertaking my fieldwork. I was mindful of my perceived position as a white, Western woman, and made sure that I addressed people in the correct way, showing respect at all times, and minimising the potential for the villagers to lose face. Secondly, it provides an important backdrop for discussions in Chapter 7 surrounding social relations as an aspect of wellbeing. By understanding the hierarchical construction of social relations I was able to interpret and analyse the way the villagers interacted with each other, as well as with those in positions of authority. In addition, by recognising the values that underpin Khmer society I gained an insight into the ways that the villagers coped with living with the continual presence of landmines, and why they often downplayed the difficulties they faced on a daily basis.

### **3.6 Spirituality in Khmer Society:**

Religion and spirituality play a key role in Khmer society, and the teachings and moral codes of Buddhism, the main religion in Cambodia, creates a strong framework for the behaviour and attitudes of the Khmer people. Buddhism puts the emphasis on “individual behaviour as the

means of personal salvation and does not foster a strong sense of collective social responsibility. It does, however, link Cambodians by creating a strong sense of national identity and by serving as one of the basic institutions of society.” (Colletta & Cullen 2000:27). Colletta & Cullen go on to state, “In many rural areas of Cambodia, the pagoda (*wat* or temple) is a prominent feature of community organisation and is the only bonding element of social life outside the family.” (2000:27).

Khmer Buddhism, as Kent (2003) argues, provides cosmological, material, political and moral security. She states that, “The area enclosed within the sacred and ritually demarcated boundary (*sima*) of the pagoda is theoretically beyond the control of secular power. It therefore represents a centre of autonomy as well as moral rectitude.” (2003:350). In rural areas, Kent goes on to explain, “Monks acquired magical powers by performing particular kinds of meditation...They became repositories of knowledge about how to protect and empower themselves and others, and still today monks in Cambodia may perform tattooing, provide sacred amulets and provide blessings to protect people or even make them invincible.” (2003:349-350). This demonstrates the magico-religious nature of rural Buddhist practice, which while guided by the *dhamma* (Buddhist teachings), is also influenced by Khmer folklore and Hindu beliefs, therefore presenting a particular Khmer brand of Buddhism that is shaped to the specific context of Cambodia.

Although pagodas used to be viewed as outside the control of external forces, they have increasingly become sites of political manipulation and power brokering. The patronage of pagodas by politicians is being used to garner power, which is still believed to reside within Buddhist temples (Kent 2006). Kent goes on to argue, “They seek in the pagoda not simply political power, but the power of transcendent virtue, as a sacred force or energy.” (2006: 350). The changing moral landscape and increasing linkages (and tensions) between politics and religion in Cambodia, which has been the subject of a growing body of literature (e.g. Kent 2008; Edwards 2008; Sreang 2008; Heng Monychenda 2008) is negatively viewed by many Khmer people because, as Kent and Chandler assert, “Religion is still regarded by a great many Cambodians as their only hope.” (2008:11).

While Buddhism represents hope for the majority of Cambodians and permeates all aspects of everyday life, there is a growing concern about the behaviour and morality of politicians in positions of authority. Kent argues that, “Buddhist theory holds that the continuance of the world is assured only when a just leader keeps the two wheels of *dhamma* spinning in

harmonious, dynamic equilibrium. If one is allowed to spin too quickly, the Buddhist universe cannot continue on its straight course but will spin into a cycle of destruction, as Cambodia did under Pol Pot. Accordingly, religion and politics cannot be understood in isolation from one another.” (Kent 2003:357). This, Heng Monychenda <sup>7</sup> (2008) maintains, requires ‘*dhammacracy*’ or the adoption of Buddhist beliefs and actions by both political leaders and the Khmer population in order for an effective and fair system of governance to be established and developed in Cambodia.

In terms of rural experiences and understandings of religion, Meas Nee (1995) in a short, but powerful book recounting his experiences under the Khmer Rouge and subsequent establishment and involvement with the Khmer NGO, Krom Akphiwat Phum, documents the way that Buddhism may assist in restoring a shared sense of community in rural Cambodia. He says, “Looked at from the outside, religion, the teaching of the monks, music, traditional games, and traditional skills are a way to strengthen the culture. But I see them not as just that. They are the way to build unity and to heal hearts and spirits. They help to create a community where everything can be talked about, even past suffering. They help to create a community where the poorest are cared about. They help to restore dignity.” (1995:70). This demonstrates the importance of Buddhist beliefs and practices for rural Khmer people not only as a way of bringing communities together, but also so that shared values and meanings can be redeveloped following the decimation of Khmer society under the KR.

### **3.7 Rural life and socioecological relationships:**

As 85% of the population in Cambodia reside in rural areas and are engaged predominantly in subsistence farming, land is of key importance for Khmer people. However, as Hughes notes, “Official land title is difficult and expensive to come by: 80% of rural households with land have no secure title and are easily displaced. Courts and local authorities who can award title or adjudicate land disputes remain highly politicised and corrupt – a situation the government has failed to remedy. Combined with frequent distress sales, associated with food insecurity and high health care costs, the pattern of land ownership has been transformed since 1989.” (2008:71). There are also increasing levels of landlessness among the rural population, which Hughes (2008) notes has risen to twenty percent, and land grabbing by powerful people has become a feature of Cambodia life, particularly for poorer villages who have neither the means

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<sup>7</sup> Heng Monychenda is a well-respected former Buddhist monk and head of the Cambodian development NGO Buddhism for Development.

nor the resources to stop this happening (Kent 2006). Landlessness can therefore be seen to be an important issue, and one that will be discussed in the context of my fieldwork in Chapter 7. As Meas Nee asserts, “No matter which village they are in, those without any land at all, are the worst off.” (1995:37). However, it is not only the lack of land that is at issue. As Meas Nee states, “More than just the land is needed in order to grow a rice crop – they have no means of ploughing, and no community support for ‘*provas*’<sup>8</sup> just yet. They struggle.” (1995:38). This results in landless settlers living on the edge of village society, unaccepted by other villagers, and without the means to successfully sustain a living, all of which places them in an extremely precarious position. Although Meas Nee wrote his book nearly twenty years ago, the same description can still be applied to landless people in Cambodia today. As Pilgrim *et al* in their study of land transfers, migration and displacement in Battambang Province argue, limited land availability, increased migration into the area and land concessions granted by the Government to wealthy business people have “...contributed to the creation of a subclass of very poor, landless households whose livelihoods depend on agricultural wage labour, locally and in Thailand, and access to the commons.” (2012:33). Landlessness can therefore be seen, as Engvall and Kokko note, to be “one of the main causes of poverty and weak human development in Cambodia.” (2007:9).

Land, which is becoming increasingly difficult to acquire as well as keep, can therefore be seen to be a key issue for rural Khmer people. Quinn (2008), in a doctoral thesis exploring how a human security approach can be usefully applied to the analysis of social welfare in Cambodia, argues that there are a variety of reasons why people become landless. He argues that, “Distress sales arose when illness struck a household requiring immediate access to money for medical costs or, in times of food shortage, where a household had limited access to family or other villager support. Sales of land were also likely where a household did not have the capital or assets necessary to work their land (e.g. cow, plough, cash for seed, food for helpers or for themselves to survive until harvest).” (2008:118-119). This point is echoed by Kent and Chandler (2008) who assert that, “The new economic conditions have rendered farmers vulnerable to the profiteering of the powerful, the poor are often forced off their lands and their access to resources, such as fish and forests, is rapidly diminishing as these are taken over by speculators.” (p.11). This is in marked contrast to the pre-war years, when as Oveson *et al* assert (1996), land had been plentiful. The shortage of land has resulted in people moving into

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<sup>8</sup> ‘*Provas*’ refers to a form of non-monetary exchange of possessions and labour among members of a community

forest areas, which have traditionally been viewed as the preserve of spirits, and which are still heavily contaminated with landmines in some places.

The movement of people into previously wilderness areas, such as the forest provides an additional dimension of difficulty for these people, not only because of the presence of landmines, but also because the forest has traditionally been viewed as a place of illness, fear and death (Arensen 2012). David Chandler in his seminal paper analysing three Cambodian folk tales, *Songs at the Edge of the Forest* (1982), explores the way in which the *prey* or forest is viewed as the domain of malevolent spirits, a place of danger and a place of fear. In this way, the relationship that rural people have with the environment can be seen to be more than just a material one, but also incorporates the negotiation of space and place at the boundary of where wild forest meets village domain. This dichotomy between the 'wild' and the 'civil', Zucker, in her analysis of Chandler asserts, forms the "ontological basis of humanity and civilisation in Cambodia." (2008:196).

The difference between the forest as wild and untamed representing chaos, and the contrasting village, as the home of order and hierarchy (Zucker 2008) highlights an interesting facet of socioecological relations. It reveals that Khmer people have a spiritual relationship with the land, and an innate fear of uncharted forest territory. As Oveson *et al* (1996) assert, there are several categories of people found within Khmer society, people of the rice fields (*neak sre*), riverside farmers (*neak chamkar*), city people (*neak krong*), and indigenous people (*neak prey*). In addition, there are other entities that are also a very real, and potentially dangerous presence in the lives of Khmer people, the *neak ta*, classed as the ancient ones or spirits of the land. These spirits, Oveson *et al* argue are, "In contrast to the prevailing Western conception of spirits as somehow 'supernatural' and of doubtful empirical status, the *neak ta* are real living persons in the experience of the Khmer peasants (Forest 1992), whether they live in Cambodia or in exile abroad (Smith 1994)." (1996:40).

In rural areas, places that were the sites of numerous deaths present a troubling issue for many Khmer people as they are forced to negotiate access to these areas that were previously deemed the preserve of the forest *neak ta*. As Langford notes, "In stories of war and terror the unsettled dead frequently intermingle with the landscape, as the ground where extreme violence occurred is reimagined. With so many sudden and untended deaths, Cambodian forests were teeming with restless spirits. There is still public discussion of whether to cremate the anonymous remains of those who were summarily piled in mass graves." (2009:692). This



was the case in the village I lived in, which had been the site of numerous deaths, resulting in much talk about ghosts and spirits, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. The presence of the restless spirits of the thousands of people who died during the KR period presents a remaking of the relationship that people have with the land, as the unknown resting place of the dead changes the way in which rural people connect with their environments, and negotiate access to the areas that are the preserve of these spirits. This means, as Langford asserts, “The dead are not so easily consigned to the past and calls for reconciliation or forgetting overlook the ways that past violence inhabits the present.” (2009:705). This is mirrored, I would argue by the presence of landmines that represent both past and present violence for affected people.

With the decimation of social structure under the KR regime Meas Nee asserts that, “The village is like a basket that has been broken and the pieces scattered. The pieces are still there but not everyone can see them. What has been broken can be rewoven slowly and gradually, but only by those who are willing to take the time to stay close to the village people and build trust with them.” (1995:40). A variety of community development projects are now being implemented by international NGOs in Cambodia. However, as Luco asserts, “There are almost no examples of associations, social institutions or instances of people getting together to protect a common interest to be found in recent Cambodian tradition.” (2002:17). This, he contends represents a barrier to the success of development projects to build community capacity and foster more collective responses to the on-going development process. How then, do rural Cambodians go about turning new places of residence into sites of belonging? Eastmond asserts that, “The two interdependent modalities of place making that seem to have characterised rural livelihoods in Cambodia, i.e. stability (use and rights of land) and mobility (clearing new land), have depended on the availability of land. In the new economic and political context [of the late 1990s/early 2000s] localisation in the sense of private ownership and attachment to land increases in significance; holding on to land becomes important to survival.” (2002:13-14). This demonstrates that land is the starting point for place-making, and that the importance of accessing plots for cultivation cannot be underestimated.

In terms of social organisation, there is an on-going debate in the literature about how rural villages are structured in Cambodia (Kent 2003). Some researchers suggest that community and solidarity have never been a feature of rural Cambodian life, a point echoed by Eastmond (2002) in his article on the repatriation of Khmer refugees. He asserts that, “The scant literature that exists on Cambodian rural social organisation, concerning the past as well as the post-war present, would not define the local village or a kinship network as ‘natural’ bases of

social identity and entitlement, less so than in many other societies in the region". (2002:8). Instead, Eastmond, drawing on the work of Ebihara argues that "In Cambodia it is the nuclear family and the household, rather than local community, extended family or another larger structured kin group which is the clearly defined and enduring basis of social identity." (2002: 8). In contrast, others, such as Oveson *et al* (1996) argue that societal structures are based more on cultural relationships, and in particular the rituals and festivals surrounding the hybrid Buddhism practiced in Cambodia. When considering this, Kent posits that if a village is a place where there is a wat and a Village Chief, as reported by Oveson *et al's* (1996) research assistant, then even though the pagoda may not be centrally located in the village, "It represented the heart of life – an axis through which relations between people were articulated." (Kent 2003:9). This then suggests that the pagoda acts as a central core in village life around which community revolves and that Buddhist beliefs and practices influence and shape social relations in rural Khmer society.

It can be seen that rural life in Cambodia revolves around land, family and religion. For those living in areas that were previously forested, relationships with the environment are negotiated not only physically, but also spiritually, with the *neak ta* who inhabit these domains. This demonstrates that for rural Khmer people, socioecological relationships are intertwined and inherently linked to all aspects of everyday life. I contend that this points to the necessity of considering the relationship that people have with the environment when conducting wellbeing research, as changes in the natural system can result in adaptation and changes in the social system and vice versa. More specifically, in this case, landmine contamination disrupts the relationship that Khmer people have with the environment, directly impacting on their wellbeing, a subject which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

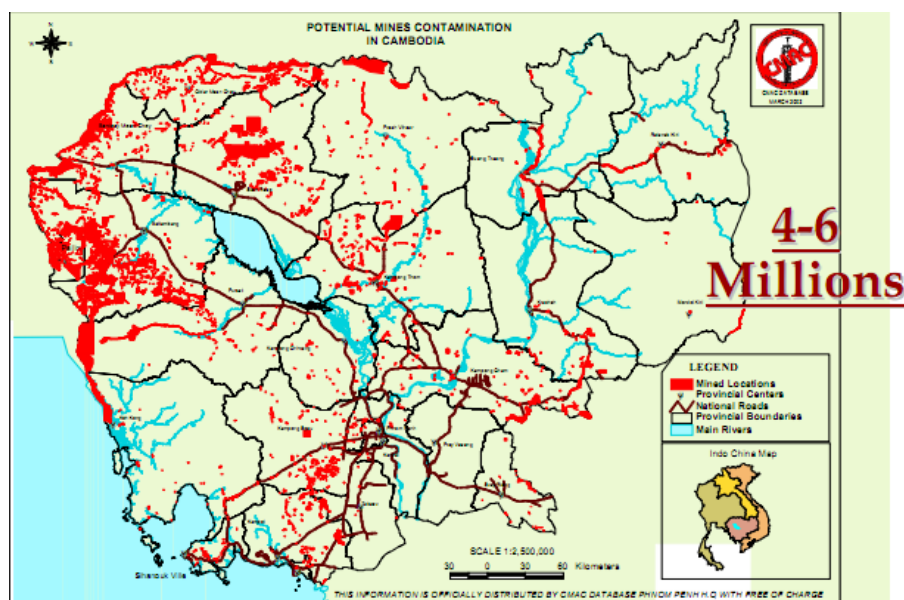
### **3.8 Landmines and mine action in Cambodia:**

Alexandra Kent argues that "One of the most pressing concerns in Cambodia today could be considered the pursuit of security – in the widest sense of the term. War is still a vivid memory and security problems continue to unsettle everyone. For Cambodians, access to food, healthcare, jobs, education and impartial arbitrators of disputes is far from assured." (2008: 78). This situation is exacerbated by the presence of landmines, which remain a threat to thousands of Khmer people living in rural areas.

GICHD note, "Since the beginning of the [mine clearance] programme in 1992, a total of 884,000 anti-personnel mines and more than 20,000 anti-vehicle mines have been found and

destroyed, and nearly two million UXO have been destroyed.” (2012: 20). However, despite over fifteen years of humanitarian mine action in Cambodia, landmines still continue to pose a significant threat to reconstruction and development, particularly in rural areas. The true extent of the contamination has been difficult to establish, although the national Level 1 Survey which was completed in 2002 estimated that 46% of villages in Cambodia were affected by landmines and ERW (GICHD 2012). Subsequently, a baseline survey was instigated in 2008 by demining organisations in twenty-one provinces and 124 districts, which was completed in 2013, with further investigations being undertaken in 2014 in another 51 suspected hazardous districts (ICBL 2014). As detailed in the map below the most contaminated regions are found on the northwest border with Thailand in five provinces (Battambang, Batan Meanchey, Oddar Menachey, Pailin, and Preah Vihear) with twenty-one districts suffering the highest density of landmine accidents (ICBL 2014). This area is also home to the 1046 km long K5 mine belt, which runs along the border with Thailand, which was laid by the Vietnamese-controlled government in Cambodia during the 1980’s in an attempt to deter incursions from resistance forces living on the Thai border (ICBL 2009). It is estimated that there are approximately 2,400 landmines per kilometre along the K5 mine belt, making it one of the most contaminated areas in the world (GICHD 2012).

Figure 3: Map of landmine contamination in Cambodia



Source: Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC)

As Monin and Gallimore note, “Thirty six different types of antipersonnel mines, from about a dozen countries have been found in Cambodia. A large number of Vietnamese mines have

been used, but American, Soviet, Chinese, Israeli, Belgian, Yugoslav, Czech and German mines have also found their way into Cambodian soil at some stage.” (2002:77). The 2013 baseline survey identified 1,112 km<sup>2</sup> of suspected hazardous land in Cambodia, of which 1,043 km<sup>2</sup> are affected by AP mines (Landmine Monitor 2014).<sup>9</sup>

Cluster munitions, UXO and other explosive ordnance are also found throughout the country, with a high concentration found in the northeast and southeast provinces bordering Vietnam, which is the result of the US bombing campaign during the Vietnam War. During that time approximately one million tonnes of general bombs and 26 million sub munitions were dropped on the country (ICBL 2009). The presence of landmines, cluster munitions and UXO has resulted in 64,314 reported ERW and landmine casualties between 1979 and 2013, of which, 19,684 people were killed and 44,630 injured (Landmine Monitor 2014), although the actual number of casualties may be much higher. Most landmine accidents occur in the northwest of the country<sup>10</sup>, as this was the main area of conflict between the KR and Government forces (GICHD 2012). Although casualty figures are falling year on year<sup>11</sup>, landmines and other UXO still kill and injure hundreds of people annually, with AT mine accidents now accounting for more casualties than AP mines (Landmine Monitor 2014). Casualty data is collected and maintained by the Cambodia Mine/Unexploded Ordnance Victim Information System (CMVIS), which is recognized as one of the most comprehensive databases of its kind in the world.

Cambodia is a signatory of the International Mine Ban Treaty, and the RCG has recognised the significant threat that landmines and UXO pose to the population and the development of the country. Cambodia was the first country in the world to have a Millennium Development Goal relating specifically to demining, UXO and victim assistance. Within this ninth MDG, the Government commits to clearing contaminated areas and developing a comprehensive framework for victim assistance. However, demining is a slow and laborious process, and in 2009, Cambodia applied for a ten-year extension on the Treaty deadline of total clearance by 2010.

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<sup>9</sup> Appendix 2 details the breakdown of landmine contamination by mine type

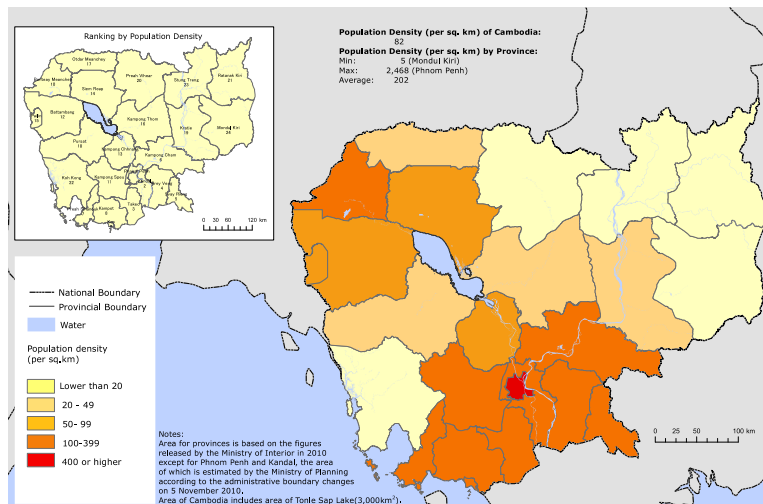
<sup>10</sup> Appendix 3 contains a map of reported landmine and ERW accidents by location in 2011 which can be compared to the map of reported accidents by province in 2005-2007 which is found in appendix 4.

<sup>11</sup> Appendix 5 details reported landmine and ERW casualties by device type between 2009 and 2013

Although it is clear that the improved wellbeing of all mine-affected people is a key tenet of the RCG and the mine action sector, as Gellman, in an article about peace building in Cambodia notes, “Cambodian conceptions of the ‘good life’ have not been systematically documented, and peace builders should recognise that this absence limits the potential for truly sustainable reconstruction to be achieved through insider-outsider partnerships.” (2010:86). This is an important point and poses a conundrum for mine action actors in Cambodia, as it remains unclear the extent to which mine clearance and subsequent development can assist in achieving something (wellbeing or ‘the good life’) that has yet to be fully defined.

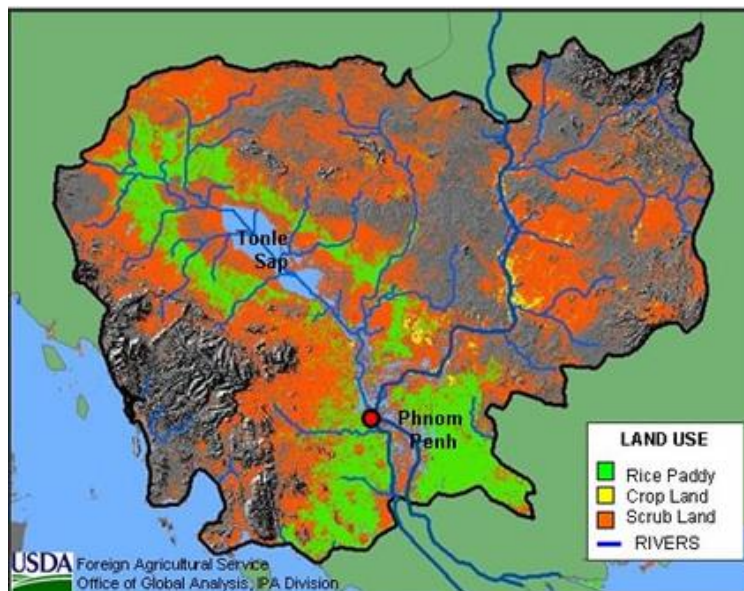
As the majority of the Khmer population live in rural areas and their livelihoods are reliant on subsistence farming, having safe access to land is a key element for continuing development. However, as McGrath notes, “The effects of mines on low-income farming communities are devastating and long-term. It is important to understand that these communities have to choose between staying and trying to survive *despite* the mines or abandoning their land and their livelihood. For most people, the latter option is not even a serious consideration.” (1994:31). It is therefore imperative that demining operations continue in Cambodia in order to ensure that the population has the means to live. The scattered nature of the population and distribution of land use detailed in the maps below highlights the difficulties that mine action organisations face in determining the prioritisation of clearance activities, particularly when concentrating on mine clearance of agricultural areas. This is coupled with the lack of infrastructure in rural areas, making accessing contaminated regions and undertaking mine clearance a difficult and hazardous undertaking.

Figure 4: Map of population density in Cambodia in 2013



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Cambodia

Figure 5: Map of land use in Cambodia



Source: United States Department of Agriculture

The Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA), the national regulating body for mine action in Cambodia states that ERW “severely affect rural livelihoods by impeding access to productive resources, markets and basic social services, land for agriculture and resettlement, irrigation, roads, access to water, health centres, schools and other rural infrastructures. When located near archaeological sites, landmines and ERW also severely affect economic activities and the development of tourism, which is a major source of revenue for Cambodia.” (2008:6). This represents a focus on the material aspects of peoples’ lives, which is in keeping with the dominant socioeconomic development discourse within international development. This is further emphasised by the mission statement outlined in

the national Mine Action Plan, where the CMAA state, “The National Mine Action Strategy’s (2010-2019) mission is to ensure that women, men and children live safely and that development can take place in a safe environment; and to ensure coordination in the provision of services, assistance and use of mine action resources in a more effective and efficient manner.” (2010:9).

Funding for mine action in Cambodia comes from both international donors as well as the RCG.<sup>12</sup> Mine action is broken down in Cambodia into the five pillars of demining; stockpile destruction; mine risk education; advocacy and victim assistance. No one national or international agency covers every aspect of mine action, and there has in the past been a dislocation between mine action activities and post-conflict reconstruction and development, although this is changing as the annual mine clearance plan is now linked directly to the commune development plan. Interestingly, the dislocation between landmine contamination and development appears to be mirrored in the literature relating to Cambodia, which unless explicitly researching the impact of landmines, tends to make no mention of the subject. While a number of articles and books detail different aspects of Cambodian history, life and culture, and explore the way that the KR period psychologically scarred the population, there is a scarcity of research that considers how people’s lives have been affected by the physical remnants of war. Perhaps, it can be argued, this demonstrates the long-term attitude towards landmines and UXO, which are now considered part of the landscape and a constant companion to everyday life.

Victim Assistance has been separated from other mine action activities at the national level, and now falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY). There are 11 rehabilitation centres that assist people with disabilities with orthopaedic, physiotherapy and rehabilitation services in Cambodia, which are supported by ICRC, Handicap International, the Cambodia Trust and Veterans International (GICHD 2012). As Thomas (2005) notes, statistics relating to the number of persons with disabilities in Cambodia remain inaccurate. However, it is widely recognized that Cambodia has one of the highest levels of persons with disabilities in the world (UNESCAP 2002). This has serious implications for rural communities and individuals whose livelihoods are dependent upon the ability to be self-reliant in terms of food production and income generation, as physical impairments can pose significant challenges to carrying out essential activities. The attitude

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<sup>12</sup> Details of funding can be found in appendices 6 and 7.

towards persons with disabilities in Cambodia is important to note here, as it demonstrates one of the reasons why persons with disabilities are still one of the most vulnerable groups in Khmer society. Thomas asserts that, “The Khmer understanding of, and attitudes towards, disability are said to be shaped by the national religion – Buddhism. In Buddhist belief, disability is the result of sins in a previous life. This belief is often cited as a significant cause of the discrimination faced by disabled people.” (2005:21.) While this may be an oversimplification, there is little doubt that, as Thomas maintains, “Disabled people in Cambodia experience significant exclusion. They suffer from direct discrimination and stigma, and from varying degrees of social isolation. They are also largely excluded from the political process and development.” (2005:7). Zook (2010), in an article on disability and democracy echoes this point, and argues that Khmer persons with disabilities have predominantly been left out of the political process. However, the RCG is committed to reducing the discrimination and stigmatization faced by persons with disabilities and in 2009 brought in the Law on the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Despite this fact, it is clear that there is still a long way to go before the situation of the majority of persons with disabilities in Cambodia is improved.

Mine action in Cambodia began officially in 1992, and by 1998, four main demining organisations were actively involved in the sector: the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC), the HALO Trust (HT) and the Mines Advisory Group (MAG). (CMAA 2010). To date, although there are a number of other smaller organisations working in Cambodia, some of which are commercial, the main actors remain the same.<sup>13</sup> CMAC was established in 1992 during the UNTAC period in order to assist refugees and IDP’s to return safely to their homelands (CMAC 2015). With approximately 1,700 members of staff, the majority of which work in the field, CMAC has its central headquarters in Phnom Penh, a training centre in Kampong Chhnang, a regional centre in Battambang, as well as demining units in Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Siem Reap and Kampong Cham (CMAC 2015). MAG and HALO have both been working in Cambodia since the early 1990s and employ both Cambodian and expatriate staff. MAG employs approximately 500 national staff, as well as 5 international staff, and HT have approximately 1100 national staff working for the organisation, with 4 expatriate staff (GICHD 2012). MAG has its headquarters in Phnom Penh as well as a provincial office in Battambang, where the main research and development takes place. HT headquarters is found in Siem Reap. Within each organisation, there are a variety of

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<sup>13</sup> Details of all mine action actors working in Cambodia can be found in appendix 8.



different roles that include, but are not limited to, organisation managers (responsible for organisational level decision making such as planning and management), programme and project managers (responsible for the management of in-country programmes), administrators, HR personnel, finance officers, logistics managers, community development specialists, community liaison managers, technical operations managers (explosive experts), platoon leaders, technical survey specialists, deminers, machine operators (of mine clearance flails, bulldozers and vegetation cutters) and mechanics.

The prioritisation of clearance activities is designed to be a bottom-up approach in Cambodia, which is undertaken on an annual basis and overseen by the CMAA. MAG was the first mine action organisation to introduce Community Liaison (CL) teams into Cambodia, and these have in the past achieved considerable success in assisting with the prioritization of mine clearance activities. CL teams liaise between affected communities and demining organisations in order to ensure that key areas are prioritized for clearance. They also act as mine risk educators, and are the means of local communities alerting mine actors to the presence of previously undetected contaminated areas. Community Liaison teams generally consist of one male and one female, and are recruited from the local populace, thus increasing local capacity in mine action activities, and ensuring that the local communities are involved in the decision-making process of demining. Consultation with local communities has been built in to the national annual workplan process which is facilitated by the Mine Action Planning Units (MAPUs) and then fed into the Provincial Mine Action Centres (PMACs). As GICHD note, the MAPUs and PMACs “coordinate with affected communities, operators and development partners to develop annual land release plans.” (2014b: 16).

The annual clearance/land release plan begins with an analysis of the baseline survey (BLS) and casualty figures in order to identify key communes for clearance. Priority is given to clearing suspected hazardous polygons identified in the BLS and where there have been landmine accidents in the past five years (WYG International 2013). Following the selection of communes, the MAPU staff engage in a series of community consultations in order to identify local priorities for clearance. This information is then fed into the PMACs where workshops are held to determine which areas are prioritised, and to assign clearance tasks to the various organisations dependent upon the assets at their disposal, including funding and equipment. This process takes a considerable amount of time, and there is no guarantee that tasks that

were not completed in the previous year will be automatically added to the new plan<sup>14</sup>. The process for developing the annual workplan can be found in Appendix 9.

It is important to note here that disputed land or land that is not officially owned by anyone is excluded from the annual workplan. As the GICHD contend, in a critique of land issues in relation to mine action in Cambodia, “Households that do not have possession/ownership rights to land are often the poorest and most vulnerable and should not be further disadvantaged by being excluded from the work plan and denied the benefits of clearance.” (2014b:22). This brings to the fore land and land rights, a highly contentious issue in Cambodia, and one which is only slowly becoming the subject of debate within the mine action literature. As the GICHD note, “Land conflict, tenure insecurity and an inequitable distribution of land are among the most pressing challenges facing Cambodia today. In a country in which most people depend on agriculture, livestock rearing, fishing and forest products for their livelihoods, secure access to safe and productive land is crucial. Yet, over the past decade land conflict has increased dramatically, with one NGO reporting having recorded disputes involving 700,000 people between 2000 and 2012.” (GICHD 2014b: 5). It can be argued that prioritizing land for clearance and subsequently releasing it involves more than a practical determination of where to target resources, but can also be regarded as a political process that involves negotiation with local and national power dynamics.

In order to undertake mine clearance, CMAC, MAG and HT use a variety of techniques, although much clearance is still undertaken manually. Manual clearance is both time and labour intensive as well as hazardous and involves individual deminers using metal detectors to locate the metal parts contained in landmines. As the GICHD note, “Manual mine clearance methods have not changed significantly since World War II. Techniques continue to rely on a deminer working along a marked lane using a metal detector, prod, rake or an excavation kit until a suspicious object is encountered. Although these methods often mean relatively slow progress, they are widespread and popular in mine action programmes, in recognition of the very high levels of confidence associated with the land they release.” (2014a: 134). Shimoyachi-Yuzawa (2012) reports that in Cambodia in 2007, 63% of mine clearance was undertaken manually, while 24% utilised brush cutting techniques and 13% was undertaken

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<sup>14</sup> A more detailed description of the annual work plan can be found in the 2012 GICHD report, Transitioning mine action programmes to national ownership: Cambodia.

using mine detection dogs. Appendix 10 details the amount of clearance undertaken in 2013 by the various agencies working in Cambodia.

CMAC has invested in a variety of demining tools and approaches in order to increase productivity that include demining platoons, demining machines, vegetation and brush cutters, technical survey teams and mine detection dogs (GICHD 2012). The demining machines and brush cutters are large heavy vehicles equipped with tillers, rollers and flails designed either to detect mines and ERW, clear vegetation or detonate hazards (GICHD 2014a). These machines increase the speed with which vegetation can be cleared prior to clearance. As King states, “In some areas of Cambodia, more than 80 percent of operational time is spent on the clearance of undergrowth—at the expense of mine clearance. One of the few areas of real progress is the introduction of mechanized vegetation cutters.” (2004: 144). The choice of method used is dependent upon the nature of suspected contamination, the threat that the ERW pose, as well as other important factors such as, “financing and security, infrastructure and terrain, and national laws.” (GICHD 2014a: 134).

### **3.9 Concluding Thoughts:**

From a review of the literature it can be concluded that there are numerous tensions inherent within Cambodian society today. Decades of war have had a significant impact on the lives and structure of Khmer society. Poverty is widespread in rural communities, and the lack of access to land significantly impacts on people’s ability to sustain their own living. There is an increasing trend of rural to urban migration as people, particularly women, seek alternative means of income outside the home. This has resulted in a growing tension between traditional gendered roles, and more liberal egalitarian attitudes, which is affecting social relationships within families and communities. As the Government pursues policies of free market trade in an effort to promote economic development, social development within the country faces many challenges, as the patriarchal hierarchical nature of traditional society is confronted by a move towards a more democratic and egalitarian society.

Landmine contamination in Cambodia can best be described as complex, with minefield layered upon minefield, and the worst affected areas found in the northwest provinces of the country. The response to the situation has led to the development of a well-established mine action sector and a national mine action strategy. A variety of both national and international organisations have been working in the country for over 15 years, utilising a range of clearance

techniques. However, despite these efforts, much work remains to be done before a mine-free environment can be achieved in the country.

The difficult situation for many Khmer living in rural areas is exacerbated by the continuing presence of landmines and UXO. However, the impact that landmines have on men and women, and boys and girls is an under-researched area. Coupled with the limited understanding of the way that Khmer people conceptualise wellbeing and what it means for life to be good, this points to a clear need for further research that considers the relationships that people have in and with the contaminated environments in which they live and how this affects their wellbeing. This highlights a gap in the literature that will be addressed by this thesis.

Within mine action, while emphasis is placed on improving the material wellbeing of mine-affected people, less consideration is placed on other dimensions of people's quality of life. This then points to the need for an alternative approach to the analysis of wellbeing that encompasses more than just material needs. I contend that wellbeing ecology, which incorporates the material, relational and subjective dimensions of wellbeing and situates these within the relationships that people have with and in their environments offers such a framework, which the following chapter will now discuss.



## **Chapter Four: Locating wellbeing in a contaminated landscape**

Landmines and ERW, for the most part, are identified in both the practitioner and academic literature as inhibitors to human security and development. While it is widely acknowledged that mines pose a significant threat to social and economic post conflict recovery (McGrath 2000), the impact that mines and ERW have on the environment is much less well documented. Scarcer still is research that considers the effect that landmine contamination has on both people and the environment. I argue that it is critical to consider the relationship that people have with their surroundings and the complex interaction of the human and natural worlds. In this way the physical or natural cannot be separated from the social. This then highlights the need for a new approach to the conceptualisation of landmine contamination that considers the effect that landmines have on people, the environments in which they live, and the relationships between people and environment. I contend that wellbeing ecology, a concept first introduced by White and Jha (2014) that I have developed, offers such an approach, as it is place and time-sensitive and considers the inter-connected and dynamic social, emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual relationships that people have with each other and their environments. By utilising this approach I reconceptualise the effect of landmines as an intertwined humanitarian and environmental issue, and in doing so highlight the importance of acknowledging and understanding socioecological relations in humanitarian and development situations.

The aim of this chapter is to document the development of wellbeing ecology as the conceptual framework I am using for the analysis of landmine impact on the wellbeing of affected communities. Beginning with an outline of the overarching wellbeing framework I am applying to this research project, this chapter will then move on to consider some of the approaches to socioecological relationships that had the potential to frame my research. I then consider the literature surrounding socioecological relations and geographies of wellbeing at the micro and macro level. Following this I discuss the importance of place for wellbeing, with particular reference to research surrounding therapeutic landscapes. This will lead on to a discussion of the ways in which this concept can be usefully adapted to the issue of landmines by considering the notion of contaminated landscapes. Within this section is a brief review of the literature surrounding risk, hazards and vulnerability. Finally, the chapter will draw together these disparate ideas, concepts and understandings as a bricolage in order to

substantiate my case that wellbeing ecology offers an approach to better understand the ways in which landmines affect the wellbeing of people living amongst them.

#### **4.1 Assessing Wellbeing:**

To date there is no universally agreed definition of wellbeing, as it means different things to different people in different places at different times. Despite, or perhaps because of this, wellbeing has become the focus for a wide body of research in a variety of disciplines including philosophy, development studies, economics, psychology and health. Despite the diversity of disciplines researching wellbeing, a common thread runs through the various approaches: that wellbeing offers a positive and holistic approach to the analysis of people's quality of life. This approach moves beyond the physiological to encompass also, "the emotional, social, and in some cases, spiritual dimensions of what it means to be human." (Conradson 2012:16).

When considering social problems, it can be seen that traditional terms such as social exclusion and poverty have negative connotations. This in itself can have a stigmatizing effect on people grouped under these headings. Changing the focus from overcoming social exclusion or combating poverty to considering improved wellbeing as a goal sets out a more positive and optimistic agenda that is open to people from all walks of life, regardless of their circumstances. This is important, as it marks a significant change in the way that social issues are conceptualised, meaning that, "Wellbeing offers an inclusive aspiration, as relevant for policy-makers and the wealthy as the poor. This can help to combat the 'othering' common in policy labelling, which sets off the target group as different – and concerned with inferior goals – from planners and programme staff." (White 2009:2). This was the consideration that caused me to use a wellbeing approach when considering mine-affected communities. Ethically, I thought it was important to see people not in negative terms as passive victims waiting for assistance, but more positively as active agents who continue to pursue the quest for a good quality of life even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

In addition to its positive connotations, wellbeing potentially offers a more holistic outlook that at the individual level brings together elements of spirit, body and mind, thereby presenting a more rounded understanding of the person. At a policy level, this implies a different interpretation of what constitutes a good quality of life that focuses more positively on strengths rather than needs, and calls for agencies to work together to achieve wellbeing as a goal, rather than in the fragmented and compartmentalized way that systems have operated in the past (White 2009). This leads on to another central tenet of a wellbeing approach, that it

is people centred as it considers a person's own priorities and perceptions, rather than outsider understandings of what constitutes a good quality of life. Traditional objective measures of social welfare such as income, life expectancy, and health, are therefore challenged as they document only a partial view of people's lives (White 2009). Instead a wellbeing approach highlights the importance of considering both objective and subjective dimensions, and puts people at the heart of the matter, thereby capturing a more holistic picture of the multiple components that constitute a good quality of life.

Adopting a wellbeing approach can also draw attention to the importance of spirituality (Appadurai 2004; White *et al* 2010; Devine and White 2013). In the Cambodian context Alexandra Kent (2003, 2008) argues that Buddhism holds the key to wellbeing for the majority of Cambodians. She asserts that, "Despite the ravages of recent history, Khmer Buddhism represents a vital source of ontological, physical and social well-being, concepts perhaps best captured by the Khmer term *sok* (from Pali *sukka*, often translated as 'happiness'), but that literally means 'good security' and in particular refers to the absence of suffering or satisfactoriness or 'insecurity', *dukkha*." (2008:79). She contends that the pagoda provides many aspects of wellbeing, including refuge, guidance, conflict resolution, education, solace, healing and food. While Kent's interpretation of *sukka* and *dukkha* as good security and insecurity is questionable<sup>15</sup>, it is clear that religion and spirituality play a strong role in the wellbeing of Khmer people.

In terms of mine action, as detailed in Chapter 2, there is now a move to combine mine action with development, indicating a more collaborative approach towards activities with affected populations that is in keeping with the current stress on participation in international development. However, I contend that a wellbeing approach offers a different conceptual lens through which to interpret these activities. This would allow due consideration to be given not only to the objective ways that clearing mines impacts on communities, in terms of access to

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<sup>15</sup> While there is much debate surrounding the way the word *dukkha* is translated into English, an in depth discussion of this is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Kent's simplistic translation of *dukkha* as insecurity is misleading, as the word encompasses a multitude of meanings. As Rahula(1974) notes, "It is true that the Pali word *dukkha* (or Sanskrit *duḥkha*) in ordinary usage means 'suffering', 'pain', 'sorrow' or 'misery', as opposed to the word *sukha* meaning 'happiness', 'comfort' or 'ease'. But the term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, which represents the Buddha's view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning. It is difficult therefore to find one word to embrace the whole conception of the term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, and so it is better to leave it untranslated, than to give an inadequate and wrong idea of it by conveniently translating it as 'suffering' or 'pain'."



land, water and so forth, but also how subjectively, people feel about this, and the changes that this may make to the quality of their lives and wellbeing. This represents a marked departure from the traditional approach to the analysis of mine impact and highlights the potential contribution to knowledge that this thesis can offer by shedding a different light on the way that mine affected communities understand and experience living with landmines and ERW.

Although a wellbeing approach potentially offers a positive, inclusive and holistic way of assessing peoples' lives, there is also a need for caution. As different people understand wellbeing differently, at different times and different places, which definition of wellbeing should be adopted? This poses a conundrum for mine action actors, as it remains unclear as to the extent that mine clearance and subsequent development can assist in achieving something (wellbeing or 'the good life') that has yet to be fully defined. As Gellman (2010) in the context of Cambodia notes, Khmer understandings of the 'good life' have yet to be systematically researched. This highlights the necessity of developing an understanding of what wellbeing means for local people within a given spatial and temporal context by seeking their own conceptualisations and incorporating these in the design of mine action and development activities. The lack of documented Cambodian understandings of wellbeing suggests an existing gap in the literature that this thesis will go some way to filling. With this in mind, it is important to explore the concept of wellbeing and to outline the broad conceptualisation used within this thesis.

While acknowledging the wide body of literature surrounding wellbeing, for this thesis I will be drawing on the work of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group (WeD) and subsequent Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways (WPP) research of White *et al.* The WeD approach to wellbeing was derived from 5 years of research in four developing countries and, as Gough *et al* note, "was founded on three conceptual frameworks: Human Need Theory, the Resource Profiles Framework, and Quality of Life Research." (2006:2)<sup>16</sup>. The WeD conceptualisation of wellbeing considers both the objective circumstances of an individual and their subjective evaluation of this. By considering wellbeing in this way, a discursive space for people to think about their objective material circumstances from a subjective perspective is deliberately opened (Copestake 2008). In addition, by asking people how they feel about their

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<sup>16</sup> The WeD research project produced a wealth of publications that document in detail the development of the approach as well as an analysis of different aspects of the project, which can be located via the WeD website: <http://www.welldev.org.uk>

situations, insight can be gained into the reasons behind their actions and behaviour (Copestake 2008). In the context of this research, taking this approach assists in understanding the reasons why people choose to live in such hostile environments, despite the physical dangers. This indicates that mine-affected people are engaged in a series of wellbeing trade-offs, a subject that will be discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

The WPP framework was developed during a three-year ESRC funded research project and draws on and further develops the work of WeD as well as the social justice approach to wellbeing utilised by the Psycho-social Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Intervention (PADHI) (WPP 2013)<sup>17</sup>. Within the WPP framework, wellbeing is defined not only in terms of individual happiness, but can be said to be experienced when people have what they need for life to be good (White 2011a). In addition, as the WeD approach posits, “Wellbeing cannot be thought of only as an outcome, but as a state of being that arises from the dynamic interplay of outcomes and processes. This interplay of outcomes and processes must be understood as firmly located in society and shaped by social, economic, political, cultural and psychological processes.” (McGregor 2006: 4). Wellbeing can therefore be thought of as both a goal, as well as a process, something that is bound by the context in which we live and the relationships that we have with others and environments. As such, wellbeing is constantly in flux and subject to both internal and external influences. This implies that while it is possible to gain a snapshot of how people are doing at a particular time in a particular place, wellbeing does not remain static, but is liable to change over a lifetime.

The WeD approach to wellbeing incorporates three interrelated dimensions: the material, the relational and the subjective. Or, to consider it in different terms, wellbeing emerges from a combination of what people have, what people do with what they have and what people think about what they have (McGregor 2006). The WeD approach also emphasises the relational dimension of wellbeing – we do not live in isolation, but share our lives and our experiences with others: from the closest family members, to friends and neighbours within the community, and on a wider scale, we are influenced by the values and cultures in which we are embedded and the rules and customs to which we are bound. In addition, as Schaaf (2010) notes, the inclusion of both objective and subjective perceptions of wellbeing is essential as it, “... moves away from prescribing for people what ought to make them happy and focuses instead on the achievement of individuals’ own kind of wellbeing, and their satisfaction or

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<sup>17</sup> Further details of the WPP project can be found on their website: <http://www.wellbeingpathways.org>

dissatisfaction with aspects of their lives.” (2010:245).

As Christopher (1999) notes, much thinking on wellbeing considers it to reside within the individual – we are all responsible for our own wellbeing. But is this really the case? I would argue that this idea reflects a particular western academic tradition of privileging the individual, and ignores the multiple and diverse ways of living found in different parts of the world that often place strong emphasis on the collective. While a number of wellbeing models have been developed using this Western perspective (c.f. Ryff 1989), questions arise as to the appropriateness of applying overly-individualistic approaches to people living in other cultures that have a more collective and relational conceptualisation of the person. This then points to the need to consider relationships between people as well as individual wellbeing.

Considering the relational aspect of wellbeing, White contends that, “Arguments concerning the importance of relationality and the politics of wellbeing clearly imply that wellbeing must be sought collectively: contrary to the dominant usage, the proper ‘home’ of wellbeing may be more properly identified at the community level than at the individual level.” (2010:168). Wellbeing can therefore be understood to reside not only at the individual, but also at the community level. She goes on to argue that there are three possible options for looking at community wellbeing. The first is to average individual wellbeing levels to get a sense of overall community wellbeing. The second is to consider wellbeing as a collective concept that resides within community. The final approach, and the one I have adopted for this thesis, is to combine collective and individual notions of wellbeing, highlighting the way that wellbeing is a social process. As White states, “Wellbeing then becomes something that happens in relationship – between the collective and the individual; the local and the global; the people and the state.” (2010:15). And, I would add here, between people and place.

By exploring the wellbeing of affected communities through the three interrelated dimensions outlined in the WeD approach, my aim is to capture an holistic picture of the ways that mine contamination impacts on the wellbeing of affected communities. This will be framed within a broader socioecological approach that emphasizes the dynamic and intertwined relationship between people and the natural environment.

#### **4.2 People and Environment: potential ways of conceptualizing socioecological relations**

There are a number of disciplines and approaches that investigate socio-ecological relations. Each approach places emphasis on different aspects of socioecological relations in order to

research a variety of issues relating to both people and environment. In order to better understand the differing theorisations of socioecological relations, I explored several of these approaches and assessed their potential as a way of framing my research. I begin by outlining the key tenets of each approach explored before moving on to discuss my decision not to fully utilize them as they did not give me the necessary tools for the kind of analysis I wanted to undertake. This led me to develop wellbeing ecology, which while taking insights from the different socioecological approaches discussed in this section, draws more substantially from research in the fields of health geography, geographies of wellbeing and indigenous studies that will be discussed later in the chapter.

#### **4.2.1 Political ecology: putting the politics into people-environment relations**

Evans argues that contemporary political ecology “arose out of a dissatisfaction with traditional versions of ecological arguments, which tended to ignore the dilemmas of people whose livelihood depended on the continued exploitation of natural resources.” (2002:8). Blaikie and Brookfield, in their seminal book ‘Land Degradation and Society’ (1987) outlined political ecology as a new approach to analysing environmental problems that grows naturally from the discipline of geography, but draws from political economy to provide a more holistic way of looking at the relationship between society and nature<sup>18</sup>. Degradation, they argue, is a social construct, as it is only when land becomes unusable for human purpose that it is classed as degraded. Although there are a variety of approaches found within political ecology, Robbins contends that political ecology explores “social and environmental changes with a normative understanding that there are very likely better, less coercive, less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things. The research is directed at finding causes rather than symptoms of problems.” (2004: 12).

While studies exist that utilise a political ecology approach to analyse war (c.f. Le Billion 2001), and more specifically the effects of landmines (c.f. Oppong and Kalipeni 2005; Unruh et al 2003), their focus is on the political processes that cause the situation, rather than an analysis of the way that conflict and landmines affect peoples’ lives and wellbeing. Ultimately, my exploration of these studies and the broader political ecology literature led me to conclude that this approach privileges political processes over the interaction between people and environment. As I wanted to develop a better understanding of the ways that the presence of landmines impact on the lives and wellbeing of affected-people by disrupting their

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<sup>18</sup> Nature is defined here in broad terms as the physical environment.

relationships with and in the natural environment, I therefore decided that this approach was not suitable as it did not give equal weight to social as well as socioecological relationships.

#### **4.2.2 Ecological anthropology and environmental sociology: culture, people and environment**

Ecological anthropology focuses on the complex relationships between people and their environments and how societies and cultures adapt to specific environmental conditions. As Panakhyo and McGrath note, “Human populations have on-going contact with and impact upon the land, climate, plant, and animal species in their vicinities, and these elements of their environment have reciprocal impacts on humans.” (2009). Environmental anthropology is an off-shoot of ecological anthropology, and is considered by some, to be a more applied type of ecological anthropology that focuses specifically on environmental problems in order to find ways of solving these issues.

While both environmental and ecological anthropology are of interest, the focus on changes in culture and processes of adaptation do not fully capture the ways that the wellbeing of people is changed when faced with environmental problems. As such, while taking inspiration from both approaches, particularly as a means of framing my thinking around the way that mine-affected people negotiate and re-establish their relationship with the environment in order to survive, I felt that a new approach was needed that made wellbeing a more specific focus.

Lockie (2004) argues that traditionally the environment has been missing from much sociological thought. Environmental sociology developed in response to this and is defined as “the study of interaction between the environment and society.” (Catton and Dunlap 1978:44). Much research within environmental sociology seeks to identify the societal causes of environmental problems, the impacts these have on people and ways to overcome them. In addition, there is an emphasis on the social processes that lead to environmental problems being redefined as social problems, a social constructionist perspective of environmental issues (Dunlap and Marshall 2006).

While I believe that it is essential to consider the relationships between people within the environment, I find the argument that all environmental issues are socially constructed less convincing. In addition, the focus within environmental sociology on social systems within the environment, rather than as coupled socio-environmental systems creates a separation between society and nature. I therefore decided to incorporate relationships as a key facet of

wellbeing ecology - between people and people, between people and the environment and between the environment and people - but do not privilege social relations over socio-ecological relationships.

#### **4.2.3 Human ecology: using natural sciences to understand people's behaviour**

As Richerson *et al* note, "The basic rationale for human ecology is that concepts and methods shared with the biological sciences ought to be useful to understand human behaviour." (1996: 4). Human ecology can therefore be viewed as the study of the behaviour of people utilising a natural science approach. Bates and Tucker when discussing the origins of human ecology contend that, "As natural scientists, ecologists are interested in three very broad questions. One, how does the environment affect the organism? Two, how does the organism affect its environment? Three, how does an organism affect other organisms in the environments in which it lives? The quest for answers to these questions encompasses almost everything ecologists do. Human ecology links the subject matters of anthropology, biology, geography, demography, economics, and other disciplines in an attempt to understand relationships between people and their environments in terms of these three areas of inquiry." (2010:4). These questions are of particular interest, as they assist in my conceptualization of the relationships between people and the environment and the affect that these have on wellbeing.

Socioecological relationships are highlighted as important within a human ecology approach. As Lawrence contends, "The interrelations between humans and their surroundings are manifested through a wide range of physiological, psychological and cultural processes... Moreover, these interrelations are not static but subject to change over relatively short and long time periods." (2003:34). From this I draw on the importance of considering the interconnected and systemic relationships between people and environment that change spatially and temporally, which forms an integral part of the framing of wellbeing ecology.

However, a critique of human ecology rests with its failure to adequately capture human values in residential movements and choice (Hannigan 2006). This draws attention to the notion of place which I believe is a key facet influencing human wellbeing and one that will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. To this end I draw more from the ecological side of human ecology by emphasizing the interconnectedness of people and environment. By considering how the environment affects people, how people affect the environment and how people affect people within the environment and then assessing the ways that these

interrelationships influence and shape the quality of life of both people and environment, I build on human ecology by adding a more specific wellbeing dimension.

#### **4.2.4 Livelihood approaches: rural agrarian people-environment relations**

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) is described by Norton and Foster as “one of a number of analytical frameworks which deal with the dynamic dimensions of poverty and well-being through establishing a typology of assets which poor individuals, households and communities deploy to maintain well-being under changing conditions. It has conceptual roots in various traditions, including applied social science, agro-eco systems/farming systems analysis and especially participatory approaches to rural development.” (2001: 12). As my research was with rural agrarian mine-affected people in Cambodia, the sustainable livelihoods approach offered a potential way of framing my fieldwork, and has therefore been included within this section on conceptualisations of people and environment relations.

Chambers and Conway offer the following widely accepted definition of a sustainable livelihood: “A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.” (1991:6). In rationalizing the SLA, Scoones notes, “The ability to pursue different livelihood strategies is dependent on the basic material and social, tangible and intangible assets that people have in their possession.” (1998:7). Drawing on an economic metaphor, he goes on to argue that livelihood resources can be viewed as the ‘capital’ base from which different productive streams are derived from which livelihoods are constructed.” (1998:7). He identifies five types of capital necessary for a sustainable livelihood, which are: natural capital, economic or financial capital, human capital and social capital.

The SLA represents a practical and theoretical approach to the assessment of rural livelihoods in development settings that can guide development interventions, provide an analytical framework to determine what needs to be done and/or be viewed as a development goal in itself (Morse *et al* 2009). However, while the SLA has been utilised to assist in development policy and intervention, there were a number of reasons why I chose not to utilise this framework. The first is that the SLA fails to fully capture ‘culture’ as an important facet of people’s lives (Adato and Meinzen-Dick 2002). In addition, as Gough *et al* (2007) argue, the SLA

conflates the social with the cultural, a flaw, which they argue hides “the significance of the role of culture, values and norms in constructing and legitimising the identities necessary for the pursuit of livelihoods and wellbeing.” (2007:24).

A second reason for my non-use of the SLA relates to the way relationships are conceptualised within the framework. As Gough *et al* contend the term social capital is problematic as “It suggests that relationships are ‘owned’ and ever-present. Rather, the relationships in which people invest must be understood as claims on reciprocity appealed to when they are needed.” (2007:23). They go on to argue that “By concentrating on the ‘having’ and ignoring the less tangible resources which individuals and households deploy, the ‘capital/assets’ approach fails to distinguish between those who can benefit from ‘social capital’ and those who cannot, let alone those who may be clearly harmed by it. They thus obscure not only the diversity of strategies that different households adopt in their pursuit of livelihoods and wellbeing, but also reduce insight into the processes that reproduce their poverty.” (2007:24). As I was trying to garner people’s subjective experiences and understandings of the way that their lives were affected by the presence of mines, the SLA’s failure to sufficiently account for the importance of relationships would not have allowed for the inclusion of the diversity of circumstances and strategies deployed by the villagers to cope with such a situation.

A final reason for not adopting the SLA framework relates to the material focus of this approach. As Adato and Meinzen-Dick, drawing on the work of Hebinick and Bourdillon (2002) contend, this framework over-emphasizes the material, at the expense of more intangible, but equally important aspects of people’s quality of life. This is supported by Gough *et al* who argue that “It is not just about what people have but what their goals and aspirations are; what they are trying to do with what they have, and about what choices they make trying to achieve these goals.” (2007:23).

Considering the above criticisms of the SLA, I decided that this framework was not suitable as a way of framing my fieldwork. Instead I chose to use a more organic approach that allowed notions of what constitutes wellbeing to be established by the people I lived with and interviewed, that did not privilege the material over the subjective or relational. As Armitage *et al* contend, the concept of wellbeing “goes beyond the material (assets) and basic needs conception as found in the livelihoods and human development literature, and reflects the importance of social, psychological, and cultural needs required to thrive.” (2012:14). In addition, my approach develops the role of nature as more than a resource to be utilised, but



instead allows for the environment to be shown as an integral part of everyday life materially, socially, emotionally as well as spiritually.

Having briefly explored the literature on political ecology, environmental sociology, ecological and environmental anthropology, human ecology and the sustainable livelihood approach, I ultimately concluded that these perspectives fail to fully capture the dynamic and intertwined relationships that people have with and in their environments, as to a certain extent they separate society from nature. As Lockie asserts, the most convincing way of re-framing social theory to include nature is found in perspectives that “abandon dichotomies (or polemical, dualistic ways of thinking) between the social and the natural.” (2004:27). This is an important point, as the separation of nature from society presents a misleading portrait of the way that people interact both with and within the environment, a central theme running through the wellbeing ecology approach I have developed.

Oliver-Smith (2004) highlights the importance of considering different approaches to socioecological relationships and suggests that other cultures do not separate nature from culture in the same way that Western society does. This led me to consider alternative perspectives of socioecological relations that conceptualize people and environment as inherently linked, with each affecting the other in a dynamic and ever-changing relationship, which the following sections will discuss in more detail.

#### **4.3 Geographies of wellbeing: micro level**

As Conradson (2012) contends, research on geographies of wellbeing offers an alternative way of framing socioecological relations. He posits that this body of research goes further than many other disciplines within the social sciences in conceptualising socioecological relations, which, he argues while considering context, tend to focus on the social domain rather than coupled and intertwined social and natural systems. In addition, as King *et al* (2014) contend in a review of the literature surrounding wellbeing within a socioecological context, the connection between ecosystems and human systems is inadequately understood and often unacknowledged. This led me to explore other bodies of literature within the field of geography, including socioecological relations, indigenous studies, and health geography which emphasise the multi-directional and dynamic relationship between people and nature, which highlights the necessity of considering human and natural systems in conjunction when analysing impact and changes in physical and social worlds. As Cattell *et al*, drawing on the work of Yen and Syme (1999) note, “Social and physical environments do not exist

independently of each other; any environment is the result of continuing interactions.” (2008: 546). This is an interesting concept, and one that I have combined together with the analysis of wellbeing as a process and which forms the underlying premise for the analysis of landmine impact on Khmer communities in this research.

Studies with indigenous peoples take the lead in drawing attention to the importance of considering this dynamic multi-directional relationship between people and nature (c.f. McGregor *et al*, 2003; Panelli & Tipa, 2007; Wilson, 2003). The underlying premise is that socioecological relations are inherently linked to wellbeing, and that human wellbeing cannot be fully achieved without the presence of a healthy ecological system. McGregor *et al* (2003) present a multi-layered ecological model of wellbeing of indigenous Hawaiian society that incorporates the individual, the family, the community, the nation and ‘Aina’, defined as the sacred and natural system that is responsible for all human life, thereby linking wellbeing from the local to the global levels. They state that, “An ecological model of wellbeing assumes that a healthy ecological system is the foundation for a functional economy and social system that can sustain a high quality of life for its residents.” (2003:108). This demonstrates the intertwined relationship between people and their environments, and the strong link between human and environmental wellbeing, which is often a characteristic of indigenous worldviews. Wellbeing ecology incorporates the notion that human wellbeing is inherently linked to a healthy ecological system, extending the scope of this indigenous view to include rural agrarian populations.

As part of their presentation of the ecological model of wellbeing, McGregor *et al* (2003) critique traditional social impact assessments, and argue that these have not incorporated indigenous understandings of socioecological relations. They posit that impact assessments that have been used to design development initiatives have failed to factor in the interconnectedness of indigenous people to the land. In addition, they argue that, “spirituality, subsistence practices and indigenous economies, collective and mutual social patterns, sense of place and ‘ways of knowing’ have been missing from conventional approaches to impact assessment.” (203:109). The failure to include indigenous ways of knowing, they assert, offers a potential threat to traditional practices and ways of life. This is not mere romanticism of a rural ideal, but instead emphasises the importance of the role that nature plays in the lives of indigenous peoples. As McGregor *et al* assert, “The conceptualisation of person-in-environment not only represents a marked departure from western social constructions, it also serves to explain the etiology of social pathos resulting from disruptions to customary and

traditional land-use patterns in indigenous rural communities.” (2003:109). I argue that this approach could be widened in scope to include rural agrarian communities and societies in Cambodia whose livelihoods and wellbeing are inherently linked to the land. In addition, by incorporating both cultural and environmental perspectives into the research design, as well as social, political, spiritual and economic variables, wellbeing ecology builds on the person-in-environment approach by adopting systems thinking as a way of analysing the interconnectedness of peoples in environments.

Echoing McGregor *et al*’s assertions about considering environmental and cultural factors when conceptualising wellbeing, Panelli and Tipa (2007) put forward a geographical model of wellbeing. In their study of Maori people in New Zealand, they emphasise the importance of place in understandings of wellbeing and state, “Here a geographic approach includes the acknowledgment of multiple implications arising from *where* experiences (and analyses) of well-being occur.” (2007:446). This allows for an analysis that puts the local people at the centre thus aiming for a more localised definition of what wellbeing is in that particular setting, at that particular time. They argue that, “Place-specific understandings of wellbeing can support generic frameworks indicating how livelihood, social systems, culture and environments intersect in place-particular configurations of wellbeing.” (2007:449). The wellbeing ecology approach I have developed draws on the work of Panelli and Tipa (2007) by emphasising the importance of place for wellbeing, viewed through the metaphor of contaminated landscape, as an essential element to the analysis of landmine impact.

Drawing on the work of Gesler (1992) and Gesler and Kearns (2002) Panelli and Tipa (2007) then present a model of place-focused wellbeing that has four dimensions. Firstly they argue that, “Studying a sense of wellbeing in place can encourage an analysis of personal and collective livelihoods as they are played out in different locations – showing variation both within and between places.” (2007:448). Secondly, by paying attention to place, appreciation is given to the infrastructure and wider social norms that affect a sense of wellbeing. Thirdly, this approach allows for the identification of different beliefs and practices that are embedded within a given locale. Finally, they argue that, “Place-specific studies of wellbeing can highlight the significance of human-environment specificity, where particular relations with, and understandings of, environments affect peoples’ way of live and their sense of wellbeing.” (2007: 449). I contend that wellbeing ecology builds on these notions and offers an approach that emphasises the intertwined relationships that people have with and in their

environments, at a specific place and time which are framed and influenced by the broader (environmental and social) systems in which they are embedded.

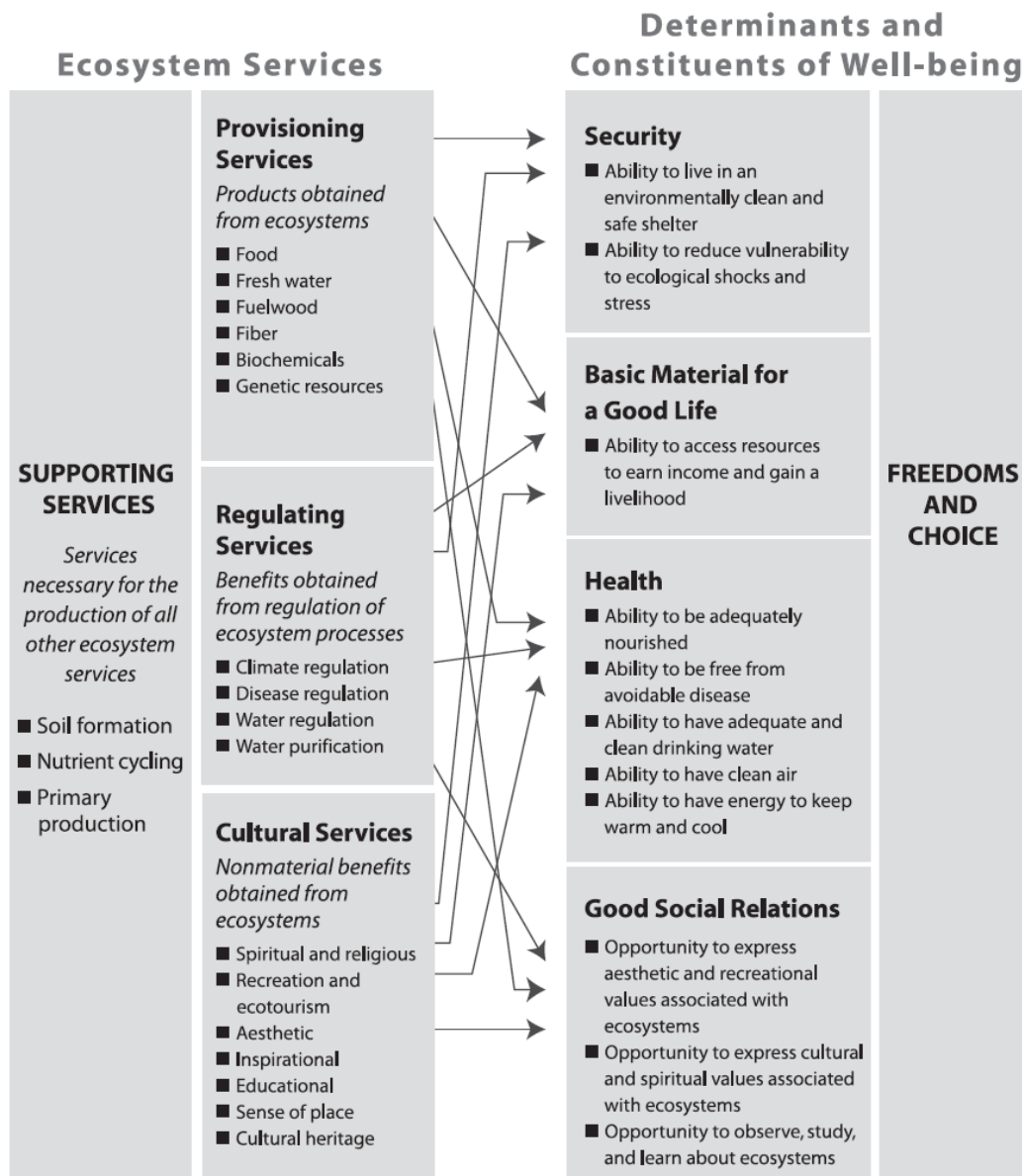
#### **4.4 Geographies of wellbeing: macro level**

While research with indigenous people highlights localised conceptions of the intertwined relationship between human and environmental wellbeing, attempts have also been made to assess socioecological relationships at a wider level. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), was commissioned by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2000, and was co-ordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme. It consisted of representatives from governments, business, NGOs, indigenous people, governments and international institutions and was governed by a multi-stakeholder board. More than 2,000 authors and reviewers contributed to the four working groups considering Condition and Trends, Scenarios, Responses, and Sub-global Assessments (MEA 2005). The objective of the MEA was to assess “the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being and to establish the scientific basis for actions needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems and their contributions to human well-being.” (MEA 2005:ii). By providing an integrated assessment of the ways that ecosystem change impacts on human wellbeing and the options available for enhancing the conservation of ecosystems, the aim was to put forward a framework that could be utilised to ensure that human needs can be met in the future. Within the assessment, wellbeing is conceptualised as multi-faceted and includes “the basic material for a good life, freedom of choice and action, health, good social relations, and security”. (Hassan *et al* 2003: 29).

Ecosystem services are a central concept of the MEA. These are defined as “The benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as regulation of floods, drought, land degradation, and disease; supporting services such as soil formation and nutrient cycling; and cultural services such as recreational, spiritual, religious and other nonmaterial benefits.” (Hassan *et al* 2003: 27).

These ecosystem services are then linked to human wellbeing in a variety of ways, as outlined in the table below.

Figure 6: MEA Ecosystem services and human wellbeing



Source: MEA 2005

The MEA conceptual framework also draws attention to human-environment interactions: “...A dynamic interaction exists between people and other parts of ecosystems, with the changing human condition serving to both directly and indirectly drive change in ecosystems and with changes in ecosystems causing changes in human wellbeing. At the same time, many other factors independent of the environment change the human condition, and many natural forces are influencing ecosystems.” (Hassan *et al* 2003: 28). This is a thought-provoking assertion as it emphasises the importance of considering the multiple factors at micro and macro level that influence the situation in any given locale.

In a review article about the MEA, Nelson *et al* offer a more in-depth analysis of one of the key principles inherent within the assessment, drivers of change. They assert that, “The underpinning assumption [of the MEA] is that ecosystem change is brought about by a complex web of interactions between humans and their surroundings as humans seek to satisfy their basic needs and improve their well-being.” (Nelson *et al* 2006:41). Drivers of change are viewed as any human-induced or natural factor that causes a change in an ecosystem either directly or indirectly (Hassan *et al* 2003). Although a variety of direct and indirect drivers of change are identified in the MEA, socio-political drivers are highlighted as being of fundamental importance in explaining ecosystem change. Of particular relevance to this research project is human conflict as a socio-political driver of change. Drawing on the work of Berhe (2000), Nelson *et al* assert that conflict can negatively impact on the wellbeing of both human and natural systems as “War-driven environmental degradation can initiate social degradation and protracted cycles of social and environmental decline by creating poverty, overexploitation of marginal resources, underdevelopment, and, in extreme cases, famine and social destruction.” (Nelson *et al* 2006:41). Interestingly enough, although war and conflict are identified as drivers of change, within the MEA no mention is made of remnants of war. This is consistent with much of the conflict literature, which fails to identify the continuing impact of mines and UXO on both population and environment.

While the MEA framework offers much for the analysis of wellbeing in terms of socio-ecological relations, it is not without its critics. Lele *et al* find the MEA lacking on a number of levels and contend that, “This approach [Ecosystems Services] tends towards a techno-economic expert-centric process of social change. This also explains why many social science disciplines or perspectives related to the environment, such as political ecology, environmental sociology, ecological anthropology, or human geography have not engaged with the ecosystem services concept; the literature has been largely dominated by economists.” (2013:352). I would agree with this assertion and contend that the MEA provides an economic conceptualisation of the natural environment as a subordinated provider of services rather than as an integral part of the human experience. This argument is supported by Norgaard (2010) in a critique of the ecosystems services approach who contends that what had initially begun as a metaphor to frame the relationship between people and nature has now become integral to the way in which social-ecological issues are analysed and addressed. He posits that this market-orientated metaphor that views nature as an agent with a certain stock of goods, or ecosystem services that benefit humankind is insufficient for such a task, and suggests that other frameworks are necessary to understand and indeed tackle environmental issues. While

the MEA provides a framework that can be highly quantified and therefore used for a variety of different technical analysis, I contend that wellbeing ecology has the potential to offer a different way of looking at things, not currently incorporated within the MEA. By considering human wellbeing within a socioecological framework that combines a relational approach not only to humans, but also to the way people interact with and in environments, wellbeing ecology suggests a more two-way relationship between people and nature. This interlinked and dynamic relationship is based not only on the material benefits that people can gain from natural resources, but also considers people's social, emotional, cultural and spiritual attachment and relationship with nature. In doing so, this highlights the importance of considering local knowledge and understandings of human-environment relationships when exploring wellbeing, as although some people may view nature as a passive backdrop for everyday activities and life, for others, it is an integral part of the human experience that requires a constant process of transformation and adaptation.

#### **4.5 People and place:**

The way that people interact with the environment and vice versa highlights the importance of place in social relationships. However, place is a contested concept, one that appears simple on the surface, but reveals greater complexity as it is explored in more detail (Cresswell 2004). As a central concept in geography, much has been written about place (c.f. Agnew 1987, 2011; Casey 1998; Massey 1999; Thrift 1999; Tuan 1974). However, while acknowledging the broad body of literature surrounding the subject, here I draw on the work of Cresswell and define place as "a meaningful location" (2004:7). Building on this, I utilise Agnew's (1987) three dimensions of 'a meaningful location' to incorporate location, locale and 'sense of place'. Agnew asserts that location is "a site in space<sup>19</sup> where an activity or object is located and which relates to other sites or locations because of interaction, movement and diffusion between them." (2011:23). Locale relates to settings where everyday activities are undertaken. Finally a 'sense of place' involves "identification with a place as a unique community, landscape, and moral order." (2011: 23). As Agnew contends, "A key tenet in the present definition is that the local social worlds of place (locale) *cannot* be understood apart from the *objective* macro-order of location and the *subjective* territorial identity of sense of place. They are all related." (1993: 263).

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<sup>19</sup> Space is defined in this thesis using Gieryns definition, as "Abstract geometries (distance, direction, size, shape, volume) detached from material form and cultural...Put positively, place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations." (2000:465)

Duff, drawing on the work of Thrift (1999) notes, "Place is a fundamental feature of human experience, deeply implicated in the development of identity and belonging, and central to the conduct of everyday life. Far from affording a passive backdrop to the manifold activity of life, place is an active and constitutive presence, shaping habits and interactions and situating or grounding all experience." (2011:149). This is important, as place then becomes the mediating setting for socioecological relations that actively affect and shape the ways that people think, behave and act. This idea is echoed in much of the socioecological literature, particularly in relation to research on resilience and sustainability (c.f. Berkes and Folke 1998; Folke 2006) whereby changes in human systems are inherently linked to changes in surrounding ecosystems and vice versa, and there is a continual process of repetition and reconstitution. This is in keeping with the wellbeing ecology approach I have adopted that considers the interlinked material, social, emotional, symbolic, cultural and spiritual relationship between people and environment, which are embedded, located and situated within particular places.

Place is also important when considering wellbeing. As Kearns and Andrew contend, "Wellbeing might be thought of as a specific emplaced state of being. Wellbeing also suggests being *somewhere*, hence bringing geography into the equation." (2010:309). Wellbeing therefore denotes not only that a person is situated within a particular place (the being), but also that recognising this is fundamental for understanding what shapes the 'well'. Schaaf echoes this point, and notes, "Wellbeing experiences and expectations depend on the nature of places and the communities situated within them. The holistic view of the social world recognises the connection between people and places, and people within places, and the influence each can have on the other." (2012:155). This is supported by Atkinson and Painter (2012) who argue that wellbeing cannot be understood without consideration of place. They assert that, "Whilst much of the research structured through the dominant approach to wellbeing treats place as something of a given, a static snapshot of settings in which various resources and experiences influence both objective and subjective wellbeing, the attention to subjective wellbeing inevitably draws in questions of what places mean to people and the role of emotional attachments to places. Such recognition is difficult to combine with a mobilization of place as contextual backdrop but rather insists on a reconceptualization of places as profoundly relational." (2012:7). This then demonstrates the need to consider not only the places people are embedded in, but also their relationships with and within these environments when exploring wellbeing.

Crighton *et al* (2003) note that there has been a move within health geography to interpret



place as 'landscape', and to extend the analysis from a purely geographical perspective, to incorporate social and cultural elements. Landscape is defined as "A combination of physical features and the imprint of human occupation, the result of an ever-changing interplay between human activity and the physical environment." (Gesler 1992:736). This interplay is also emphasised by Malpas who asserts, "Landscape may be shaped by human involvement, but the human is itself shaped by landscape, and neither has the upper hand in this relationship—each is appropriated by and to the other." (2011:7). In terms of wellbeing, Kearns and Andrews posit, "For health geographers the idea of 'landscape' is a metaphor for the complex layering of history, social structure and built environment that converge to enhance or corrode human wellbeing in particular places." (2010:311). It is to this conceptualisation of place as landscape that this chapter will now turn.

#### **4.6 Place as landscape:**

As Malpas notes, "Landscape is a representation of place, and as such, it is the re-presentation of a relatedness to place, a re-presentation of a mode of 'emplacement.'" (2011:7). Landscape can therefore be seen as a visual concept (Creswell 2004), and as such provides not only the setting for the interplay between humans and nature, but also presents a way of visually interpreting or reading what can be seen. This is in keeping with the methodology utilised in my thesis, which incorporated participatory photography and photo-elicitation interviews in order to attempt to 'see' wellbeing through the eyes of the villagers, as will be discussed fully in chapter 5. As Meinig (1978) contends, if a group of disparate people are asked to look at a view from a window and to describe some of its components and then ascribe meaning to what they are seeing, different people will interpret the scene in different ways. He puts forward ten possible views, while acknowledging that there could be more, that include landscape variously as nature, habitat, artefact, system, ideology, history, aesthetic and place. But it is the conceptualisation of landscape as place that is of most interest because, as Meinig asserts "a well-cultivated sense of place is an important dimension of human well-being." (1978:46). With this in mind, I will now turn to a body of literature that is concerned specifically with the study of particular landscapes that are thought to be imbued with healing properties that promote human wellbeing – therapeutic landscapes.

#### **4.7 Therapeutic landscapes:**

The concept of 'therapeutic landscapes' has been explored within the field of health geography, and in particular has drawn attention to the way that certain landscapes are associated with increased wellbeing. Therapeutic landscapes, a phrase first coined by Wilbert

Gesler (1992) are “Those changing places, settings, situations, locales, and milieus that encompass both physical and psychological environments associated with treatment or healing.” (Williams 1998:1193). As such they can be described as places that prove beneficial to people’s health and wellbeing, and in keeping with this definition, much of the research focuses on extraordinary events in time, such as visits to shrines, spas and so forth. As Cutchin notes, “To explain the utility of cultural ecology<sup>20</sup>, Gesler drew on traditional cultural geography’s notions of culture and environment interaction. He stressed that the interaction was bidirectional in that humans shaped their environments in order to survive and flourish, but they also needed to adapt and adjust to environmental changes in order to try and establish a balance in the relationship. Although Gesler was writing about health care, his ideas may be applied to environmental health and well-being.” (2007:730).

Gesler also argued that, “To interpret therapeutic landscapes, it is essential to introduce the notions of symbols and symbolic landscapes. Both concrete and abstract symbols, signs<sup>21</sup>, icons, and tokens are used by humans to express meaning.” (1992:739) This is interesting as it links health and wellbeing (here defined in a more limited medical way) to the multi-directional relationship between people and place, and promotes the analysis of the symbolic landscape in order to better understand the cultural structures governing attitudes and behaviours in any given setting. By interpreting landscape in this way, it is possible to identify the values and priorities that people ascribe to a given place. Williams emphasises this further in her study of therapeutic landscapes and holistic medicine. She states, “Landscapes are also symbolic systems, as they are partly the construction of cultural images and signs (Ley 1985; Smith 1993). The culturally defined health and healing symbols found in the landscape are central to the concept of therapeutic landscapes as they significantly determine the ‘way of seeing’ the landscape (Gesler 1991: 170).” (1998:1196). She goes on to argue, “If one recognises that place is not just a physical entity, but rather invested with meanings, one understands a place or landscape through the conceived and perceived world. Thereby, places are open to multiple meanings and representations.” (1998:1200). In the context of this project, this interpretation of landscapes provides a useful conceptual tool for exploring the various different meanings that the research participants ascribe to a particular landscape.

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<sup>20</sup> Cultural ecology is the study of “the ways in which culture is used by people to adapt to their environment.” (Sutton & Anderson 2010: 4)

<sup>21</sup> Symbols and signs include things such as flags (national symbolism), white coats (denoting a doctor), skull and crossbones (signifying landmines) whose meanings are culturally ascribed and as such can be read semiotically (through studying signs).

How do the local Khmer participants construct their landscapes, and how is this different to national or indeed international mine action actors? If places are imbued with meaning that is shaped by the social and cultural systems in which a person is embedded, then it would seem that there is ample room for a myriad of interpretations of how landmines affect the people in a particular locale. This highlights the importance of exploring the meaning that local mine-affected people ascribe to their landscapes in comparison to the various ways that mine action actors understand the same landscape. With this in mind, this thesis will present an analysis of the way the same situation is seen by both local villagers and mine action actors in order to better understand the differences and similarities in the conceptualisation of landmine impact (see chapter 8).

While much of the literature on therapeutic landscapes focuses on extraordinary events or place, Kathleen Wilson (2003) explored the daily lives and events of First Nations peoples and concluded that there was a complex link between land, culture and health. Her research focused on everyday lives and geographies, and she adopted an analysis of place from a more social and spiritual aspect. She argues, "The land does not just represent a physical space but rather, represents the interconnected physical, symbolic, spiritual and social aspects of First nations cultures." (2003:83). This is an interesting idea as it combines multiple aspects of the day-to-day experiences of people and their relationship with the land. Drawing on this concept, my thesis explores the importance of land for local Khmer people by considering the dynamic relationship that mine affected communities have to the land and the wider environment. In this way I extend Wilson's approach to incorporate not only indigenous peoples, but also rural agrarian people, whose lives are inextricably linked to the physical, social, spiritual, and political landscapes in which their lives are led, and more specifically, the land on which they live, work and rely on for their livelihood and quality of life.

Surprisingly, only a limited amount of research has been undertaken on therapeutic landscapes outside of America, Europe and New Zealand (Wilson 2003). In addition, few studies have examined the negative impact that certain places may have on human wellbeing and the development of a sense of belonging (Manzo 2005), and those utilising the therapeutic landscape framework are scarcer still. This thesis can therefore usefully add to this body of literature by conducting the study in a developing country context, and by building on the idea that a landscape can negatively affect wellbeing. To this end, I present the concept of contaminated landscapes, an idea that I have developed in order to better understand and analyse the ways that the presence of landmines reconstitutes people's relationship with their

environments, resulting in a significant deterioration of their quality of life.

#### **4.8 From therapeutic to contaminated landscapes:**

If certain landscapes can have a therapeutic effect, is there a discernible negative effect on wellbeing where landscapes bear the marks of trauma, conflict, or on-going risk and insecurity? As Curson and Clarke note, “The environments within which people live and work are not the benign settings we often assume them to be. Some of them are, to differing degrees and for a variety of reasons, potentially pathological.” (2004:238). This led me to the idea of ‘contaminated landscapes’, as the conceptualisation of place within wellbeing ecology. By conceptualising landmine contamination as more than the legacy of past and present conflicts, and instead as part of the everyday current landscapes of affected populations, I would argue that landmines and ERW have, in effect become naturalised hazards which constitute a contaminated landscape. My aim is therefore to explore how such landscapes impact on the wellbeing of people, temper the way people live, behave and view and make sense of their localised environment, thereby changing their relationship to the land.

Linking in with the remaking of place and landscape, Sampson and Gifford (2010) explored the importance of place in the resettlement of young refugees in Australia. They argue that “It is clear that place matters when it comes to restoring health and promoting well-being and for those who have been forcibly and violently uprooted from place, the restorative powers of place and place-making are not to be underestimated.” (2010:117). They identified four constituent parts of therapeutic landscapes that were essential for ensuring the wellbeing and settlement of young refugees. These are: places of opportunity (that encourage meaning and purpose); places of restoration (that reduce anxiety and promote dignity); places of sociality (that foster connections with others) and places of safety (that promote a sense of security). Duff echoes this point and notes that, “Enabling places ostensibly facilitate wellbeing through a renewal of ‘diminished functional resources and capabilities’ (Hartig and Staats 2003: 103). This includes the alleviation of stress and anxiety (Korpela *et al* 2008); greater belonging and personal meaning (Williams 2002); enhanced safety and personal security (Sampson and Gifford 2010); as well as an elevated sense of personal satisfaction or self-efficacy (Cattell *et al* 2008).” (2011:150).

The work of Sampson and Gifford (2010) and Duff (2011), and the underlying principles of place-making, geographies of wellbeing and the intertwined relationship between people and nature led me to consider what the characteristics of a contaminated landscape would be, and

whether or not they would be directly opposite to those of therapeutic landscapes. Would they engender feelings of isolation, devastation and fear? Certainly these are some of the characteristics found within mine affected communities, particularly for those people who are the victim of mine incidents and for their families. Indeed, landmine survivors who continue to live close to the places where their injuries occurred may associate these contaminated landscapes with the above-mentioned characteristics. Alternatively, uncertainty could be a key factor of a contaminated landscape. Does a particular field constitute a means of production and earning a living or is it a field of death? Is a contaminated landscape then a locale where no sense of place can be made – where people are unable to develop a sense of belonging? And finally, does a physically contaminated landscape then seep in to all other areas of peoples' lives affecting them socially, culturally, economically and emotionally? These are some of the questions that I explore in chapter 7 drawing on the data generated during my time living with a mine-affected community in Cambodia.

#### **4.8.1 Hazards, risk and vulnerability**

Inherent within the concept of a contaminated landscape is the notion of risk, which directly relates to peoples' vulnerability and their capacity to cope with the dangers and hazards that they are exposed to while living in such a hostile environment. If hazards are defined as, "a threat that can potentially cause damage to people, property, or other elements. It can be natural (earthquake), technological (chemical spill), or man-made (civil war)." (Dewan 2013: 38), landmines could be characterised as man-made and/or technological hazards. While much of the literature surrounding hazards, risk and vulnerability relates to natural hazards such as floods and earthquakes, as Wachinger *et al* contend, "The neat distinction between natural and human-induced hazards is slowly vanishing." (2013: 1062). In addition, as Dewan notes, "As there are several approaches to evaluate the societal risk of natural hazards, the different notions of natural hazards are blurred, making it increasingly difficult to separate natural hazards from technological hazards or social hazards such as violence and war." (2013: 36). As such, and despite the emphasis on natural hazards within this literature, parallels can be drawn with the situation of people living with the presence of landmines. This section of the chapter will therefore briefly explore this body of work in order to situate my conceptualisation of a contaminated landscape within broader social theory.

Much of the literature surrounding risk, hazards and vulnerability is found within the sphere of disaster management. Thywissen contends that, "There has been a paradigm shift in some vital concepts evolving around the understanding of human livelihood. The human being is

moving more and more into the centre of attention. General understanding of security has shifted from the nationalistic and militaristic perspective to a more individualistic and humanitarian one - human security. Another paradigm shift has taken place in the shift from income poverty (financial affluence) to human poverty (well-being). This shift has been paralleled in disaster management by a shift from seeing disasters as extreme events created by natural forces, to viewing them as manifestations of unresolved development problems.” (2006:10). He goes on to argue that it is important to recognise the different conceptualisations, interpretations and perceptions of terms and concepts such as risk, hazard and vulnerability, as these have importance not only academically, but also in the practical arena of disaster management. He asserts, “The language used by workers in the disaster field frames, focuses, and limits the kinds of questions they ask.” (2006:11) and then provides a comprehensive glossary of different definitions for key terms within the disaster and hazard sphere. Similarly, Alwang *et al* (2001) present a review of different disciplinary understandings and conceptualisations of vulnerability and risk, revealing the wealth of different uses, definitions and understandings of the concepts of risk, hazard and vulnerability, which I will now move on to explore.

As Adam and Van Loon argue, “For social scientists, perceptions of risk are intimately tied to understandings of what constitutes dangers, threats and hazards and for whom.” (2000:3). This is supported by Dewan who notes, “While hazards are a potential threat to populations and the environment, risk is the interplay between hazard and vulnerability.” (2013:39). But what constitutes risk? Beck in his seminal work, ‘Risk society’ defines risk as “a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself. Risks, as opposed to older dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and to its globalization of doubt” (1992: 21). In later work, Beck goes on to argue that, “The concept of risk thus characterizes a peculiar, intermediate state between security and destruction, where the *perception* of threatening risks determines thought and action.” (2000:213). In this sense, as Adam and Van Loon contend, “The essence of risk is not that it *is* happening, but that it *might be* happening.” (2000:2).

Beck (1992) identifies a variety of different risks that affect people. He contends that in the past, people were more in danger from ‘natural risks’, such as earthquakes and floods. However, he argues that with the onset of industrialization, ‘manufactured risks’ became a greater threat to people, which are man-made hazards such as pollution from factories. However, with the onset of advanced industrialization and the technological era, Beck asserts

that 'contemporary risks' which are still classed as manufactured, such as carbon emissions or natural resource depletion, are no longer localized, but threaten people around the globe. Contemporary risks, Beck argues, are the product of the process of modernization itself. People are affected differently by contemporary risks, and as Beck argues, this is due to social inequalities, which means that, "wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom." (1992:35).

If the risk and hazards of today are "risks of modernization" (Beck, 1992:21), landmines generally, and more specifically in this case, in Cambodia, could be thought of as a modern risk, created by technological innovation in the methods of warfare and the product of modernization that led to the Cold War. When considering mine contamination in Cambodia, the driving force behind the Vietnam War was the Cold War between the American and Soviet superpowers. As Pol Pot claimed to be attempting to instigate a utopian rural agrarian society in Cambodia, reversing all signs of modernisation as viewed from a western perspective, it would, on the surface, appear to counter Beck's thesis that reflexive modernisation and the rise of agency over structure. However, the use of modern warfare techniques, and Pol Pot's attempts to rid Cambodia of the influence of external forces in actuality represents a reverse form of modernisation that generated huge risks for the population, which still affect the Khmer people today.

Using an analogy of an atomic or nuclear accident, Beck contends that, "They outlast generations. The affected even include those not yet alive at the time or place where the accident occurred, but born years later and long distances away." (1992:22). This could also be likened to the impact of landmines, which have the capacity to lie dormant under the ground for years before being detonated, and represent an underlying hazard or, in the words of Beck, a contemporary risk. As Beck asserts, "To put it differently, in the risk society the unknown and unintended consequences come to be a dominant force in history and society." (1992: 22). If, as Adam and Van Loon argue, "The im/materiality and in/visibility of the threats that suffuse the 'risk society' mean that all knowledge about it is mediated and as such dependent on interpretation." (2000:3), the risks inherent within a contaminated landscape are dependent not only on the presence of physical hazards (landmines), but also an individual's perception and knowledge of the situation, and his or her ability to cope and adapt. In this way, the perception of risk can be viewed as equally as important as the risk from the hazard itself. The perceived threat of landmines is debilitating, regardless of whether landmines are physically present or not within the landscape.

Wachinger *et al* contend that, "Perceptions may differ depending on the type of risk, the risk context, the personality of the individual, and the social context. Various factors such as knowledge, experience, values, attitudes, and emotions influence the thinking and judgment of individuals about the seriousness and acceptability of risks. Perceptions also play a major role for motivating individuals to take action to avoid, mitigate, adapt to, or even ignore risks." (2013:1049-1050). Following their analysis of a number of risk perception studies, they conclude that there are three broad responses to risk which are paradoxical. The first is that individuals understand the risk, but choose to live in a particular place because the benefits outweigh the potential drawbacks and negative consequences. Secondly, they contend another response is that the individuals understand the risk, but negate any sense of responsibility, instead passing agency onto another. This risk paradox is related to the notion of trust, and the belief that structures and institutions will be able to afford assistance in times of disaster. Thirdly, they contend that individuals understand the risk, but do not have the resources to change or affect the situation. This, they contend is "linked to confusion or ignorance about the appropriate action to take as well as a lack of capacity/resources to help oneself." (2013:1059).

Wachinger *et al's* findings are of interest in exploring the concept of a contaminated landscape and the reasons people choose to live in such places when they know that there is a risk that they could be killed or injured by landmines. A potential explanation can be found in the doctoral research of Lisa Arensen (2012) undertaken in Battambang Province on local cosmologies in the aftermath of war. She describes the way in which suspected mined land at the edge of the forest presented the villagers she interviewed with both opportunities and threats. She notes, "It was in the dangerous condition of the land, ironically, that its potential lay, creating an opportunity for land-hungry settlers. It was because of the presence of mines and the recent cessation of conflict that land in the area lay largely unclaimed. If the settlers could survive the dangers inherent in clearing and cultivating potentially mined land, they could secure land tenure and establish agricultural livelihoods. The war altered terrain thus offered both peril and promise to those willing to enter it." (2012:160). Lack of land, desperation and the need to sustain a living can therefore be seen to be the driving force to take the risk of living in a contaminated landscape, which represent places of both opportunity and threat.

As Thywissen contends, "Risk usually involves a decision by the person at risk (to take a certain



risk or not), always presuming the individual knows about the risk. ... What complicates the matter further is the fact that the perception of probability connected with the risk varies from individual to individual, and group to group.” (2006:11). This is supported by Dewan who argues, “The risk to a particular community varies over time and depends on their socioeconomic, cultural, and other attributes, signifying that the risk of natural hazards depends on both the hazard and the capability of the community to withstand shocks from disaster.” (2013: 39). This mirrors the work of Chambers and Conway (1991) in the development of the SLA and signifies the importance of considering risk to hazards in conjunction with vulnerability. Crichton (1999) puts forward the risk triangle, whereby the level of risk is dependent upon the presence of hazards, people’s exposure to them and their vulnerability to the situation. Dewan also emphasises the relationship between the three concepts, and states that, “While hazards are a potential threat to populations and the environment, risk is the interplay between hazard and vulnerability.” (2013:39).

Risk can therefore not be fully understood without considering the vulnerability of populations to hazards. As Alwang *et al* contend that, “Vulnerability begins with a notion of *risk*.” (2001:2). In this way, as Cutter *et al* argue, “Vulnerability is the pre-event, inherent characteristics or qualities of social systems that create the potential for harm. Vulnerability is a function of the exposure (who or what is at risk) and sensitivity of a system (the degree to which people and places can be harmed).”(2008a: 599). The concept of vulnerability has now become a keystone of natural hazard research (Dewan 2013). To date there are now a variety of different approaches to the analysis of vulnerability, which as Cutter *et al* (2003) argue means that, “Vulnerability has many different connotations depending on the research orientation and perspective.” (2003:242). However, Dewan (2013), drawing on the work of Cutter (1996) contends that research on the causal structure of vulnerability to hazards can be divided into three broad streams. These are, “(1) the human ecological perspective, which focuses on the source or potential exposure of biophysical or technological hazards; (2) political ecological perspective, in which vulnerability is seen as a social construct and is rooted in community or individuals’ socioeconomic backgrounds; and (3) an integrative approach that focuses on both potential exposure and societal response capability. Spatial context, or location, is the focal point of the latter theme.” (2012:38). This confirms my argument above regarding the different approaches to socioecological relations.

Hewitt, writing from a human ecology perspective asserts that, “Vulnerability assessment is essentially about the human ecology of endangerment. Moreover, we can show how

vulnerability is embedded in the social geography of settlements and land uses, and the space or distribution of influence in communities and political organisations.” (1997:143). He goes on to argue that there are different types of vulnerability and states, “It is important to distinguish inherent weaknesses of individuals from social disadvantage. This is the kind of vulnerability associated with, say, landlessness or urban overcrowding, or a lack of access to training and education, better paid employment, and a variety of resources and services. It relates to disadvantages that arise from more or less permanent social conditions. They can be called ‘structural’ vulnerabilities, by analogy with ‘structural adjustment’ or ‘structural violence’. The vulnerabilities arise from the fabric of social life rather than hazardous conditions or accidental changes.” (Hewitt 1997: 146). In developing the concept of contaminated landscapes, I have taken insights from this approach, particularly in relation to how social interactions affect the situation of individuals and communities living within such environments.

Considering vulnerability from a political ecological perspective, Blaikie *et al* note that, “Until the emergence of the idea of vulnerability to explain disasters, there was a range of prevailing views, none of which dealt with the issue of how society creates the conditions in which people face hazards differently.” (2003:10). Oliver-Smith argues in a similar vein and states, “Vulnerability is the conceptual nexus that links the relationship that people have with their environment to social forces and institutions and the cultural values that sustain or contest them.” (2004:10). This perspective emphasizes power, politics and the distribution of resources as well as the economic and cultural elements of a community and focuses on establishing causal factors influencing vulnerability and why the effects of hazards are unevenly distributed across individuals and communities (Dewan 2013). The political ecology approach to vulnerability is also of interest when considering contaminated landscapes as it emphasizes the underlying characteristics that shape a population’s vulnerability to mines by considering the power structures and dynamics at play within a given locale.

Within the literature there are a number of different models for assessing vulnerability, such as Blaikie *et al*’s (1994) Pressure and Release (PAR) model, and their subsequent Assets model; Cutters (1996) Hazards of Place (HOP) model and subsequent Disaster Resilience of Place (DROP) model (Cutter *et al* 2008b), and Hewitt’s (1997) regions of risk. While these are of interest, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore these models in detail. However, despite the different approaches to the conceptualisation of vulnerability, Cutter *et al* (2008a) assert that there are four common elements to the numerous frameworks, conceptual models and techniques for the assessment of vulnerability. These are, “(1) the examination of

vulnerability from a social-ecological perspective; (2) the importance of place-based studies; (3) the conceptualization of vulnerability as an equity or human rights issue (Sarewitz et al., 2003) and (4) the use of vulnerability assessments to identify hazard zones, thereby forming the basis for pre-impact and hazard mitigation planning.” (2008:599). My conceptualisation of vulnerability draws predominantly from the first two elements, emphasising the importance of the relationship between people and environment in a particular place as a way of understanding how and why the villagers came to live within a contaminated landscape.

#### **4.8.2 Contaminated landscapes: crisis as context**

As Bankoff contends, “Vulnerable populations are those at risk, not simply because they are exposed to hazard, but as a result of a marginality that makes of their life a ‘permanent emergency’”. (2004:29). In one sense, people residing in contaminated landscapes could therefore be classed as continually living in crisis. Vigh (2008) in his work on crisis and chronicity argues,

“Traditionally we have been accustomed to think about crisis as a rupture in the order of things; an intermediary moment of chaos where social and societal processes collapse upon themselves only to come to life after the crisis is overcome (Kosseleck 2002:8, 16). Our theoretical impulse has been to approach crisis as a singular event rather than as an on-going experience, overlooking the fact that for people such as, for example, battered wives, abused children or gang members, trauma is plural and the suffering arising from crisis the norm. When we look a bit closer into the phenomenon of crisis it becomes clear that conflict, violence and abject poverty can become so embedded in the social fabric that they become indistinguishable from it making crisis chronic and forcing people to make lives in fragmented and volatile worlds rather than waiting for normalization and reconfiguration.” (Vigh 2008: 8).

This approach to crisis is one that can be usefully applied to the situation of landmine contamination. The on-going uncertainty faced by numerous people in mine-affected regions over a period of years could certainly be viewed as chronic crisis that has resulted in risk and insecurity becoming part of their everyday lives.

In addition, Vigh contends that when crisis is conceptualised as a temporary state of affairs, or a singular event, research generally focuses on the *post*, as in post-conflict, post-trauma. However, as he states, “The focus on *post*, implying as it does a notion of crisis as an

interruption in 'normal' life, seems, however, to obscure the fact that a great many people find themselves caught in prolonged crisis rather than merely moving through it." (2008: 8). This then brings in the notion of normalisation, whereby prolonged crisis becomes a "frame of action" (Vigh 2008:11). However, as Vigh notes, "Though we may talk about the normalisation of crisis we should not confuse normalisation and routinisation with indifference: crisis when it is chronic, may become normal in the sense that it is what there is most of, but it does not become normal in the sense that this is how things should be." (2008:11). Drawing on this idea, I would argue that this research project could usefully add to the understanding of the way in which landmine contamination produces new landscapes, highlighting the ways that people adapt to long-term hazards, and how over time, a contaminated landscape becomes normalised without ever becoming the way 'things should be'.

Wood (2006) analyses the different ways that security or conversely insecurity impacts on people's wellbeing. He argues that, "If fear is a key element of ill-being, so security is a key part of its resolution and thus a feature of wellbeing. Fear is strongly associated with the unknown, with uncertainty and unpredictability. It is associated with not knowing if one has the resources (mental, material and social) to cope with unassessable challenges, it is not knowing if one can discharge emotional and cultural responsibilities for kin and friends, it is not knowing whether one can protect oneself or offer protection to valued others in the present and future." (2006:10). Although Wood is arguing more in terms of socio-economic security, this could equally be applied more literally to physical insecurity derived from living in a mine-contaminated environment. Does this physical insecurity seep in to all parts of the lives of mine affected communities, and lead to social and economic insecurity? Does long-term exposure to physical danger require risk taking in order for mine-affected people to pursue their livelihoods? This certainly appears to be the case, as research from within the mine sector highlights the calculated risks that many mine-affected people make when going about their everyday lives (Maslen 2004).

The work of both Wood and Vigh has prompted me to think about the implication of landmine contamination as prolonged crisis, and the ways that this continual insecurity would impact on the wellbeing of mine affected communities. If a contaminated landscape is conceptualised as crisis as context, where the local ecosystem is significantly transformed by the presence of mines, then how do local populations adapt to this situation? What happens when mine action projects remove the contamination? Is there then a period of recovery when a different

relationship between nature and people is constructed? My data suggests that this is indeed the case, which is discussed in detail in chapter 7 of this thesis.

#### **4.9 Rethinking the conceptualisation of landmines:**

Landmines are conceptualised within the literature as unwelcome remnants of war, a legacy of conflict which remains after the fighting has stopped. However, rather than a linear progression from conflict to post-conflict, due consideration needs to be taken of remnants of war as a continuing form of violence despite the cessation of hostilities. Galtung (1990) defines violence as “avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of need satisfaction below what is potentially possible. Threats of violence are also violence.” (1990:292). He contends that there are three overarching types of violence: direct, structural and cultural, which he views as a triangle of violence. He argues that cultural violence is the legitimiser for direct and structural violence, and in this way, “Direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a ‘permanence’ remaining essentially the same for long periods, given the slow transformations of basic cultures.” (1990:294). In addition, each type of violence enters time differently, much, as Galtung asserts, like earthquake theory, whereby the earthquake is the event, the tectonic plate movement is the process and the more permanent condition is the fault line.

Galtung puts forward a typology of violence (both direct and structural) based around four related, but separate human needs: survival needs, wellbeing needs, identity needs and freedom needs. These, he argues are the constituent parts that must be met in order for human beings to flourish. In addition, Galtung argues that nature could be added as a fifth column, as it represents “the sine qua non for human existence.” (1990:292). This is in keeping with the wellbeing ecology approach framing this project; one that recognises that it is not only human interactions that are an important consideration when exploring the violence of landmines, but also the way in which the environment is changed, and the subsequent impact this has on people living there. As Galtung asserts, “Ecological balance is probably the most frequently found term used for environment system maintenance. If this is not satisfied, the result is ecological degradation, breakdown, imbalance. Ecological balance corresponds to survival + wellbeing + freedom + identity for human basic maintenance. If not satisfied, the result is human degradation.” (1990:292). I have taken inspiration from Galtung’s contention that ecological balance is an integral part of human wellbeing, and incorporated this into the wellbeing ecology approach I present in the next section of this chapter.

As Machlis and Hanson (2008) contend, “Among human activities, war is common, almost constant, and sweeping in its ecological impact.” (2008:729). They argue that research on the environmental consequences of war and the subsequent effect this has on coupled natural and social systems is limited, and fragmented across disciplines. Building on this idea, there is potential to reconceptualise the way that landmines, as remnants of conflict are perceived. As Berhe (2005) argues, in her analysis of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, it is necessary to explicitly recognise the intertwined relationship between social and natural systems and the inherent link between environmental and human welfare when analysing landmine impact. In subsequent research, Berhe (2007) develops this argument and cites a variety of ways that landmines cause environmental degradation, which include denial of access to vital resources, loss of biodiversity, chemical contamination and loss of productivity. (2007:6). In a similar vein, Leaning (2000) identifies four main ways that landmines accelerate environmental damage. She states that, “Fear of mines denies access to abundant natural resources and arable land; populations are forced to move preferentially into marginal and fragile environments in order to avoid minefields; this migration speeds depletion of biological diversity; and land-mine explosions disrupt essential soil and water processes.” (2000:1159). The findings of these authors point to the need for further research on landmine impact that takes into consideration the interconnectedness of social and natural systems, and the devastating effect that mines have on both people and planet. This thesis offers such an insight, and in doing so reconceptualises landmines as a combined humanitarian and environmental issue.

Berhe also posits a number of related socio-politico-economic factors that are affected by landmine presence that include: community health, poverty, social marginalisation, and aid dependency (2007:10). Interestingly, Berhe highlights different temporal and spatial scales when analysing the ecological impact of landmines, which bears close similarities to Galtung’s (1990) analysis of violence. In addition, Berhe emphasises the interlinked socio-politico-economic factors that range from instantaneous to immediate to protracted to persistent and finally cumulative. Instantaneous impacts include death and injury of flora and fauna at the point of detonation; immediate impacts incorporate chemical contamination in the vicinity of an explosion; protracted impacts may involve the movement of populations away from mined areas; persistent impacts may be the denial of access to land and living in a continual state of fear, while cumulative impacts can include the degradation of soil fertility which then affects farming and therefore livelihoods (Berhe 2007). In this way, impact is viewed over time and

distance and incorporates both ecological damage as well as the subsequent effects this has on social-political systems. There is scope to build on Berhe's work, as the participants of her sample were drawn from actors working in mine action and development, and did not incorporate mine-affected people. By including participants from the mine action sector *and* affected populations at a local level, I further develop Berhe's (2007) analysis of the impact of mines and ERW. By mapping the various stakeholders involved, and seeking their understanding of the impact of mines, the diversity of views can then be compared and contrasted. In doing so, this provides a space for local communities to tell their stories and voice their concerns and fosters a greater understanding of the needs and priorities of affected populations.

Unruh *et al* (2003) also highlight the importance of considering socioecological relations in the analysis of mine impact. They maintain that, "There exists a critical need to consider the spatial effects of landmines on processes of national recovery from conflict where mine presence is a significant feature. Specifically, there is a need to examine the broader socioecological relations that are disrupted by landmine presence and how the recovery processes intersect with this presence in different contexts and at different scales." (2003:842). This then highlights the need for research from the micro to the macro level in order to better understand the ways that landmines affect villages, provinces and countries. By combining an analysis of the temporal impact of mines through interviews with affected community members with the exploration of cycles of adaptation and transformation from an historical perspective, a more in-depth understanding of the impacts that mines and ERW have on social-ecological systems can be realised. This, in turn, links in with the concept of wellbeing as a process that is inherently influenced by past experience, while being shaped by aspirations for the future (White 2011b).

While studies exploring the socioecological impact of landmines are limited, research that incorporates an analysis of the way people's spiritual relationship with the environment is disrupted by conflict is scarcer still. Ramanathapillai (2011) in an article exploring how modern warfare has affected a spiritual disconnection from land concludes that, "War aims to disrupt normal life, destroying the symbiotic relationship between people, work, land and spirituality. The eco-self<sup>22</sup> is damaged. Besides the death of millions, the destruction of environment and

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<sup>22</sup> Eco-self or ecological self refers to the way that an individual's personal self is constructed not only from social, cultural and political values but also from a deep-seated physical closeness to the earth. (Ramanthapillai 2008)

the disconnection and alienation of people from land is the most tragic outcome of modern warfare.” (2011:119). More specifically, in terms of landmines, Ramanathapillai contends that, “In peacetime, dormant landmines and cluster bombs limit the mobility of farmers and children in the villages. Fear of walking in the streets, in paddy fields, and in schoolyards turns the life of the farmer’s family, greatly connected to land, to one of death. Land is no longer a loving nurturer but rather an indiscriminate killer with its hidden explosives.” (2011:119). This represents a somewhat different interpretation of the impact of war that highlights the importance of considering not only the physical effect that mines have on peoples’ lives, but also the ways that these remnants of war change peoples’ relationship with the land emotionally and spiritually. As such, a new approach is needed that incorporates people’s minds, bodies and spirit, as well as considering the broader systemic socio-ecological relationship between people and place. I contend that wellbeing ecology offers such an approach, which this chapter will now discuss.

#### **4.10 Wellbeing Ecology:**

So what is wellbeing ecology? White and Jha (2014) first coined the phrase within the context of their wellbeing research in Chhattisgarh in India. They argue that for Adivasi communities, “Social solidarity is linked with a shared responsibility to care for the earth. Personal wellbeing is therefore grounded in a broader wellbeing ecology, in which culture, community and place connect to the political economy of environment, rights and resources.” (2014:1). Building on this statement, and consolidating the discussions within this chapter about wellbeing, socio-ecological relations and place, wellbeing ecology can therefore be thought of as an approach that incorporates a number of elements.

Firstly, wellbeing ecology is concerned with the material, subjective and relational dimensions of peoples’ wellbeing – what they need for life to be good (White 2011a). In adopting this approach, wellbeing ecology puts people at the heart and allows for localised meanings and understandings of wellbeing that consider the mind, body and spirit in conjunction.

Secondly, wellbeing ecology recognises and emphasises the relationship between people and their environments. This conceptualisation draws attention to nature as more than just a provider of material services, but instead as an active and constituent part of what it means to live a good life, physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. One form of this would be with indigenous Australian Aboriginal understandings of the natural environment that views it as something that acts as a living being, while also being a resource and a system for supporting



life (Yotti'Kinglsey *et al* 2009). In addition, there is an element of guardianship, whereby people who rely on the land for their lives and livelihood protect the natural environment as a supporter of life and a living entity in its own right. People are tied to the land they live and work with in a continually adapting and transforming relationship. This means that changes in social systems can result in changes in environmental systems, and changes in environmental systems can result in changes in social systems. If an environment is degraded, be it through deforestation and the subsequent loss of biodiversity, through extreme weather conditions such as floods or droughts that result in soil depletion, or in this case landmine contamination, this then presents an adverse environment that negatively affects the people living in it. This effectively changes the way people act and engage with the new landscape that has evolved on a number of levels. Not only are people denied access to fertile and safe land at the basic physical level, which inhibits their ability to sustain a living, feed their families and maintain a sense of dignity through these actions, but their sense of place and belonging is challenged. The environment no longer provides a safe home, but instead becomes a hostile place, a contaminated landscape that negatively affects their quality of life.

Thirdly, wellbeing ecology suggests a systemic interpretation and understanding of the way that people relate to others and the environment. People are connected – to each other and to the environments in which they live. As such, wellbeing ecology explores the way that relationships between people and with the environment affect each other by drawing on the three questions driving ecologists as outlined by Bates and Tucker (2010), and then considering how this affects both human and environmental wellbeing. By utilizing a relational approach within wellbeing ecology I emphasise the interconnectedness between people and place and am able to explore the ways that the presence of landmines disrupts and transforms both social and socioecological relations.

The fourth aspect of wellbeing ecology is that it is place-sensitive. We are all embedded, embodied and situated in a particular place, and as such it is essential to take into account not only what wellbeing means for people, but also where this understanding is developed. What may be an enabling environment for one person could be a hostile and disabling environment for another, and as such it is important to explicitly recognise and acknowledge the importance of where people are located geographically, socially and temporally when assessing wellbeing. In addition, place (as locale, location and sense of place) assists in the understanding of collective notions of wellbeing – we share places and experiences. Place, then, provides an active and constituent part of our everyday life experiences that inherently

affects wellbeing in the present, and shapes our aspirations for the future. As such place provides the grounding for wellbeing, and is a fundamental part of wellbeing ecology as an approach that considers the inter-connected and dynamic social, emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual relationships that people have with each other and the environments in which they live.

#### **4.11 Concluding Thoughts:**

Wellbeing ecology offers a new approach for conceptualising the way that wellbeing is understood and located. By drawing particularly on the literature on geographies of wellbeing, indigenous studies, health geography and therapeutic landscapes, I have developed wellbeing ecology as an approach that is systemic, considers the inter-connected and dynamic social, emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual relationships that people have with each other and the environments in which they live, and where understandings of wellbeing are mediated through shared experiences of place over time. In this way, wellbeing ecology builds on political ecology, environmental sociology and human ecology by taking insights from each approach, and drawing them together in a bricolage to develop a more holistic approach to understanding socioecological relations and the way that these relationships affect the wellbeing of people.

In the context of this thesis, wellbeing ecology is useful for the analysis of the impact that landmines have on the wellbeing of local people in a number of ways. Firstly, as it is clear that there is a dynamic bi-directional relationship between people and nature, then landmines and ERW should be viewed as a socioecological issue. When mines are sown, the ecosystem is transformed, which in turn leads to the transformation of embedded human systems through a process of adaptation. This change in the human system in turn impacts on the surrounding ecosystems through changes in land use, population movement and so on, and is driven by wider forces at national and international level. This constant flow of influences between people and nature impacts on the wellbeing of both human and natural systems and therefore warrants further research in order to better understand how this unfolds in mine contaminated landscapes.

Secondly, for the purposes of this research, the notion of contaminated landscape has been utilised, which is not just physical, but also spiritual, cultural, social, political, economic, emotional and symbolic, thus expanding the traditional geographical understanding of landscape. This in turn highlights the multiple interpretations and meanings that can be

applied to any given landscape, which is shaped by the cultural and social values in which the person or people are embedded.

Thirdly, remnants of war are a missing link in the analysis of environmental problems. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment mentions conflict, particularly in relation to power struggles over natural resources, but remnants of war, landmines and UXO have no place in the analysis, despite their examination of the prevalence of war in the modern age. It is surely remiss not to include these weapons when assessing human wellbeing and ecosystems, as they have significant effect on the way both systems exist. I contend that a wellbeing ecology approach addresses this gap in thinking by considering the effect that landmines and ERW have on both people and the natural environment as intertwined systems.

Fourthly, if we accept Vigh's argument that prolonged exposure to crisis results in crisis as context, then it is imperative to consider contaminated landscapes in this way. Continual exposure to mine contamination can be contextualised as a prolonged progression of stresses and shocks that need to be analysed across space and time. In addition, by exploring the literature surrounding risk, hazards and vulnerability the broader context that forces people to move to such hostile places is highlighted. Considering risk and vulnerability in this way reveals that the direct and immediate physical risks of landmines are not the only causes of vulnerability for the people living within a contaminated landscape. Instead, mines constitute a particular form of hazard, and the ability of individuals to survive and even flourish in such situations is dependent upon their overall vulnerability (structural and individual) and capacity to adapt and overcome the hardships found in such places.

Considering all of these aspects, I contend that applying a wellbeing ecology approach to the analysis of landmines usefully contributes to the wellbeing and socio-ecological literature, draws attention to the importance of socioecological relations in humanitarian and development settings and is also valuable in assisting in the reconceptualization of landmine contamination as a negative influence on wellbeing from a combined and interlinked humanitarian and environmental perspective.

## Chapter Five: Methodology

This chapter details the methodology of the project, which utilises a variety of qualitative data generation methods. Beginning by outlining the overall methodology, I will then turn to a discussion of each phase of data generation in relation to the various qualitative research methods I employed. The chapter then moves on to reflect on the ethical considerations inherent within the research project, followed by some of the ethical dilemmas I faced during fieldwork. The chapter will then consider my role as a researcher before concluding with reflections on how my own wellbeing was affected by living in a mine-contaminated landscape.

### 5.1 Research methodology:

I begin this section of the chapter with a quandary. How should I define the methodology of this research project? While I use elements of ethnography, my research is not, in the traditional sense of the word, an ethnography as the time and scale and lack of deep immersion within the field (more of a quick dip than a prolonged soak) precludes this title. Instead, it is more of a *bricolage*, where, in the words of Denzin and Lincoln, “The researcher, in turn, may be seen as a *bricoleur*, as a maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages.” (2005:4). As such, I drew from a variety of different methods that I adapted to the reality of the situation. By adopting this approach I had the flexibility to explore unexpected and interesting information that emerged during fieldwork, rather than following a prescribed formulaic process of data collection. I was also able to adapt my data collection methods to the specific situation at hand. As Kincheloe notes, “In its hard labours in the domain of complexity the *bricolage* views research methods actively rather than passively, meaning that we actively construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the ‘correct’, universally applicable methodologies. Avoiding modes of reasoning that come from certified processes of logical analysis, *bricoleurs* also steer clear of pre-existing guidelines and checklists developed outside the specific demands of the inquiry at hand.” (Kincheloe, 2004:2). To this end, I used a variety of qualitative research methods and attempted to piece together a holistic picture of the project landscape from multiple stakeholder perspectives. As a researcher I could therefore be classed as an interpretive *bricoleur* with this thesis representing a *bricolage* or “a pieced together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation.” (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 4).

The methodology is in keeping with who I am as researcher. As an interdisciplinary nomad I bring together a multitude of perspectives drawn from my past and present lived experiences around the world, from Europe to Asia to Australasia and back again and in the various guises I have donned of teacher, trainer, aid worker and business woman, to name but a few. By reflexively considering my own position within the research context and within the wider world, and combining this with the variety of perspectives offered by the various research participants, I aim to gain an insight into the complexity and multidimensionality of the situation, and the diverse ways of knowing inherent within this research project (Kincheloe 2005).

Kincheloe posits that a key ontological and epistemological assumption of a *bricolage* approach is that, “The domains of the physical, the social, the cultural, the psychological, and the educational consist of the interplay of a wide variety of entities—thus, the complexity and the need for multiple ways of seeing advocated by bricoleurs.” (2005:327). Reality is by its very nature complex and the construction of knowledge is influenced by the social, cultural, psychological, educational systems in which people are embedded. It can therefore be argued that, “The bricolage exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world.” (Kincheloe 2005:324). It is therefore important to consider the wider context influencing individual understandings of reality and to explore the underlying forces at work that shape and continue to shape these beliefs. In this way, a greater and more holistic account can be furnished that presents multiple ways of understanding a situation, without privileging one viewpoint over another. As Kincheloe notes, “To be well prepared, bricoleurs must realise that knowledge is always in process, developing, culturally specific, and power-inscribed. They are attuned to dynamic relationships connecting individuals, their contexts, and their activities instead of focusing on these separate entities in isolation from one another. In this ontological framework, they concentrate on social activity systems and larger cultural processes and the ways individuals engage or are engaged by them (Blackler 1995).” (2001: 689). Ontologically then, “Any social, cultural, psychological, or pedagogical object of inquiry is inseparable from its context, the language used to describe it, its historical situatedness in a larger ongoing process, and the socially and culturally constructed interpretations of its meaning(s) as an entity in the world (Morawski 1997).” (Kincheloe 2004:51). By seeking out the diverse ways of understanding the situation of mine affected communities in Cambodia, the aim is to holistically explore the intersection of multiple perspectives, and to identify the forces that have shaped these beliefs from the micro to the macro level.

Having outlined the overarching methodology, it is now time to briefly review the sampling strategy before going on to discuss the qualitative methods I utilised during the research, which will be documented chronologically mirroring the actual fieldwork phases.

## 5.2 Sampling:

Although I had planned a neat sampling strategy that incorporated purposive sampling as a means of selecting participants in a strategic way that related specifically to the research questions I was asking (Bryman 2008), the reality was very different. For the main part I used snowball and convenience sampling throughout my fieldwork. Connections from one person turned into contacts with other people, some of whom became participants and some of whom did not. I attempted to maintain a gender balance, although in a sector as male dominated as mine action, invariably I interviewed more men than women. However, in the village I was able to incorporate relatively equal numbers of male and female participants of a variety of ages. In total I interviewed 12 international mine action actors and 6 national mine action actors. Whilst in the village I conducted 50 individual and household interviews, as well as an additional 10 photo-elicitation interviews following the participatory photography part of the research.

## 5.3 The Methods:

My fieldwork was intended to be multi-layered in order to capture the multitude of perspectives inherent within the project sample, and consisted of three phases. Phase 1 was a mapping exercise, with the aim of interviewing mine action actors in the UK who worked internationally, alongside document analysis and mine action project mapping. Phase 2 consisted of interviewing both national and international mine action actors in Cambodia, while Phase 3 took place in the confines of a rural mine contaminated community in Northwestern Cambodia. The timetable for data collection can be found below:

Table 1: Data collection timetable

Phase	Start	End	Location	Methods
1	Nov 2011	Nov 2011	UK	Interview with mine action actor Document analysis and mine action project mapping
2	Nov 2011	May 2012	Cambodia	Interviews with mine action and development actors & scoping of potential communities.

3	May 2012	End Sept 2012	Cambodia	Local mine-affected community: Interviews (individual & household) Participatory photography & photo elicitation interviews Observation
	End Sept 2012	Oct 2012	Cambodia	Further interviews with mine action actors

I used a variety of qualitative data collection methods during my fieldwork that included: interviews (individual and household), participatory photography, photo elicitation interviews and observation, and will now move on to discuss these individually within the different phases of fieldwork.

#### **5.4 Phase One: Interview in the UK and mapping exercise:**

Phase one of my fieldwork took part in the UK and consisted of an interview with one person working in the mine action sector before leaving for fieldwork in Cambodia. The interview took place just before I left and was the culmination of longer standing exchanges with him. The interview provided invaluable background information about the mine action sector as a whole and also more specifically of the Cambodian context. This particular interviewee became a key informant and facilitated introductions with a number of other people working within the sector both internationally and in Cambodia, some of whom I interviewed and some who provided me with further contacts. He also provided me with access to members of his organisation who were based in country who I interviewed during Phase Two of the fieldwork. It was also useful in that I was able to develop an interview guide for future semi-structured interviews that allowed me to cover areas of interest including motivations for working in the sector, understandings of the impact of landmines on the wellbeing of affected populations, the way in which priorities for projects were set and how success was measured. The guide was also flexible enough to provide a space for interviewees to bring up any other subjects that they felt were important, which in some cases led to some interesting discussions of aspects of the mine action sector that I had not previously considered.

Before leaving for Cambodia I was able to map out the various mine action programmes and projects taking place in country, which gave me an understanding of the mine action context and assisted in identifying further interviewees for Phase Two of the fieldwork. The National Level 1 Survey was also useful for providing an overview of the overall landmine contamination situation in Cambodia and to identify possible areas in which to conduct the third phase of

fieldwork, living in a mine affected community. This phase therefore set the scene for my fieldwork and marked the start of my strategic networking plan to make myself known to as many mine action actors as possible in order to ensure that I had a broad cross section of participants for the phase two interviews. This was extremely hard work, and involved a certain amount of tenacity, determination and persistence. I found it quite daunting contacting people about my research initially as I was unsure how I would be received as a researcher attempting to access the sector and more specifically mine-affected communities. Mine action is notorious for being the preserve of ex-military personnel (although this is changing, as documented in Chapter 2) and I had been warned that it was an insular sector where outsiders were often viewed with suspicion. However, these fears proved, for the main part, to be unfounded. From the start I was open and honest about my research and stressed the point that I was there to learn. I would like to acknowledge here that the exercise of summarising my research into a sentence, which was the first thing one of my supervisors made me do, was invaluable, as I repeated this sentence hundreds of times throughout my fieldwork. What I found was that generally people were interested and receptive to the project although turning interest into concrete interviews proved somewhat challenging at times, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

### **5.5 Phase Two: 11<sup>th</sup> MSP, interviews with mine action actors & strategic networking:**

Phase 2 of my fieldwork took place in Cambodia. My plan was to try and interview as many national and international mine action and development actors working in Cambodia as possible in order to gain valuable background information about the landmine situation and to gather a variety of viewpoints in order to build up a picture of the various understandings of the ways that landmines impact on the wellbeing of affected populations. The use of interviews was a deliberate choice of data collection at this stage, as it was my aim to capture a variety of perspectives on mine action and the landmine situation in Cambodia. As Miller & Glassner note, "Those of us who aim to understand and document others' understanding choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality." (1997:100). All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, as experience with telephone, Skype and e-mail interviews during previous research had highlighted the importance of being able to observe the non-verbal communication of participants, such as their body language, in order to develop a greater understanding of the nuances inherent within the discussion.



In total I interviewed 15 male and 3 female international and national mine action actors, from the majority of mine action agencies working in Cambodia and beyond. The interviewees held different positions within their organisations including country directors, communication managers, programme officers, mine action advisors, community development managers and people who had worked in mine action for many years but had since left the sector. The majority of these interviews were completed before going to live in the mine affected community, four took place in the village, and two were conducted after I had left the village. The interviews pre-village provided valuable background information and highlighted potential issues to explore during my time in the village, some of which were confirmed as important by the local community, and some of which were not. The interviews with mine action actors living and working in the village provided me with a more grassroots level perspective of mine action and allowed me to corroborate the information I was gathering from the villagers. The interviews I conducted after living in the village took a slightly different form and function as they enabled me to discuss some of the findings from my time living within the mine-affected community, and therefore acted as a form of verification and triangulation of the village data. The interviews before, during and after my time in the village proved to be rich sources of data and assisted me in identifying both the similarities and the differences between the ways in which different actors interpreted the effect that living with landmines had on the wellbeing of affected people.

Timing was an important issue for me and there was a certain degree of synchronicity during my fieldwork. I was fortunate that the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of State Parties on the Anti-Landmine Convention (11MSP) was due to be held in Cambodia the week after I had arrived, and I was able to register to attend before leaving the UK. The 11MSP consisted of high-level inter-governmental sessions, a variety of side sessions hosted by various NGOs and organisations working within the sector, field trips and social events. It therefore represented an ideal opportunity for me to see the whole sector in action right from government to grassroots level and to network with a wide variety of people involved in mine action.

The 11MSP began with a day trip to visit the Institute for Peacekeeping Forces, Mine and ERW Clearance in Oudong. Throughout the day I was privy to a wide variety of demining techniques undertaken by CMAC, the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, the Cambodian Self-Help Demining Organisation, the Japan Mine Action Service (JMAS), MAG and the HALO Trust which included mine clearance dog teams, vegetation clearance machines, emergency first aid drills, female demining teams, and manual clearance using metal detectors. During the visit I talked to

people from around the world involved in the mine action sector including anti-landmine campaigners, delegates from different mine-affected countries, staff from in-country clearance agencies and officials from various governments. The visit to the Peacekeeping Institute was an interesting beginning to my fieldwork that gave me an insight into how clearance is undertaken, and one that left a lasting impression on me.

In the days that followed, the 11MSP began in earnest. High-level plenary sessions took place every morning where officials from different mine-affected governments reported on their progress in achieving mine-free countries. Running in parallel to the plenary sessions were a variety of side sessions run by different organisations, loosely themed around the five pillars of mine action. These I found more interesting as I was able to observe the interactions between the different people involved in the mine action sector. I learned a lot during the week of the 11MSP, and made connections with people working within the sector in all sorts of roles: from Ambassadors to landmines survivors, Foreign Ministers to deminers and everyone in between and it proved to be an invaluable introduction to the mine action sector and more generally my fieldwork. Some of the people I met became friends and confidantes, while others provided me with valuable background information, gave me a sense of some of the frustrations and tensions within the sector and helped me begin to understand their motivations for working in mine action.

Talking to numerous people at the conference, I found that only a limited number had spent any length of time in the field. My initial impression was that the majority of mine action actors appeared to be distant – physically and experientially – from the lived reality of affected communities, a point that was verified during subsequent interviews with mine action actors and direct observation in the village. Attending the conference highlighted that for those working in the sector there is no doubt that landmine clearance is of key importance. However it also revealed that the process of prioritising projects and negotiating funding is a political one that is dependent upon the way that organisations are able to market themselves and their skills and the relationships that they have built up after many years working in the sector.

During the 11MSP I interviewed a number of mine action actors. I found that I had to be flexible and adaptable in my approach to interviewing, as people only had a limited amount of time to talk to me, so I took opportunities as they arose and made sure that I had my digital recorder and notebook with me at all times. The interview settings were varied and in some cases quite challenging, including a roadside café replete with squawking parrot, various bars,

as well as the occasional office. As mentioned previously, I had developed an interview guide which I used for all of the mine action actor interviews. I began each interview by asking how the participant had got involved in mine action and what motivated them to keep working in the sector, as a way of deliberately focusing their thinking onto a personal level. This proved to be an interesting approach and resulted in some very detailed life and career histories, some of which were quite surprising: from museum curating to mine action is one that particularly springs to mind. By taking this approach, I was able to gain a glimpse into the more personal motivations people have for doing what they are doing before moving on to discuss their understandings of the ways that landmines impact the wellbeing of affected populations and how mine action projects are designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated. This was important because I wanted to establish individual understandings of the effects of mine contamination that could then be compared to the broader sector and international conceptualisations of landmine impact. In some cases it was clear that I was hearing the 'party line', which may in part be due to the position the individuals held as representatives of their organisations. Alternatively, it may have been because they did not want their own personal views to be recorded as they deviated from official lines, and would therefore be perceived as criticising the current situation, which could potentially jeopardize their organisation's position in Cambodia. When this happened I followed up with a question directly relating to their individual experiences of working in the sector, in order to regain the personal focus of our interview. This was successful in most cases, and the majority of interviews were informative, and included some frank discussions about the sector and some of its shortcomings.

## **5.6 Phase Three: Living in a mine-affected community:**

The overarching aim of this phase of the data generation was to work with the community to understand the ways that living with landmines impacts on their lives and affects their wellbeing. By utilising more participatory and visual methods in this phase, in addition to individual and household interviews, my aim was to capture a holistic picture of the reality of living with landmines from the villagers' perspective.

Negotiating access to a mine contaminated village proved a somewhat challenging experience. Prior to leaving the UK to undertake fieldwork in Cambodia I had been assured by one mine action agency that they would be happy to assist me in locating a mine affected community. However, what is agreed at headquarters does not always translate into practice at the field office and after a three-month period where I was put on hold by in-country staff, I eventually received permission to access the field. From there I was passed on to a member of the team

working in the provincial office in Battambang, the province that I had identified from the Level 1 Survey and discussions with mine action actors which would be the most suitable for the third phase of my fieldwork. Despite patience and persistence, I was unable to negotiate a field visit with this organisation and decided instead to adopt a different strategy for accessing the field. In the meantime I had developed a good working relationship with the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) and one of their senior staff had become a key informant and had put me in contact with various national mine action actors in Battambang province where I then based myself. Following a visit to a mine field, another CMAC key informant, PO, based in Battambang who is involved in community development programmes took me to visit a joint mine clearance and development project in a remote rural mine contaminated community. As is sometimes the way with fieldwork, while visiting the Village Chief's house in the village, PO suggested that this would be a good place to base myself for the third phase of my fieldwork, and suddenly, after months of waiting, I had found the community in which I would spend four months of my fieldwork. However, it was not until a month later that I was able to move to the village as permission had to be granted by the Village Chief, the Commune Chief and the District Chief, as well as more senior CMAC staff. The main concern expressed by all parties was that I would not be able to live in such basic conditions, and that four months was a long time, as very few foreigners had spent a prolonged period living in the field. Funnily enough, it was my past experience of living and working for several years in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border that convinced CMAC staff that I would be able to adapt to the situation. In addition, a lot of doors opened up for me in the village on the basis of my previous work, as many of the villagers had lived in refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border at roughly the same time that I was on the Thai-Burma border and we were able to build relationships based on some shared common ground, even though my experiences were of course, very different from their own.

The village itself is approximately 55km away from Battambang town in a remote rural location. There is no electricity, no running water and no health services in the village which consists of 159 households and 602 people. Houses are generally built from bamboo with thatch roofs or wood next to the dirt roads running through the village and the main occupation is subsistence farming, predominantly rice, but in some cases the villagers also grow corn and sesame to supplement their incomes. Life is hard for the people in the village and it is a very hand to mouth existence. The community was established in 1997 and at that time consisted of only 5 families. The area had not previously been inhabited, and when the first settlers arrived it was densely forested and heavily contaminated with both anti-tank and

anti-personnel mines as it had been a thoroughfare for both government and Khmer Rouge forces, and both sides had laid mines offensively and defensively. Plots of land were allocated in the early days by Government forces who had remained in the area, and later by the VC, who had been given this job by the VC of a neighbouring village. However, following clearance activities and land release, more and more people arrived in the village from all over the country. Talking to the villagers it became clear very early on that they had come to the area for one reason, and one reason only - land. Land is key for livelihood and is central to numerous aspects of the wellbeing of the villagers, as will be discussed in detail in the Chapter 7.

At this point, I must add a caveat about my use of the term 'villagers' in this thesis. When I refer to the villagers, I am utilising the term to identify the group of people who were living in the same geographical area. The villagers were by no means a homogenous group, and during my time in the village the material and social differences between the people living within the same community became apparent. Some people materially had very little and lived in small bamboo shacks, with few possessions and only a small amount of land. Others had more substantial houses built of wood, with corrugated iron roofs and had over 3 hectares of land. There was also a marked social hierarchy within the community, with the VC holding most power, followed by his friends, as well as those who held more land. Men were generally privileged over women and the lowest social strata were the landless families living on the edge of the village, who had ramshackle homes, no land, no jobs and were, from my observations, struggling just to survive. Appendix 11 details the villagers that I interviewed during my fieldwork, and includes basic demographic information such as age and sex, as well as an indication of their material living circumstances, which was garnered from both observation and interviews.

CMAC have undertaken three clearance sweeps in the village. During the first sweep they cleared 15 meters from the main dirt road through the village, which enabled people to build houses on safe land. The next sweep cleared land 50 meters from the road that meant the villagers could begin to grow crops on their land which was generally located behind their houses. The final sweep of clearance, which was on-going during my time in the village was wider and encompassed fields that could then be cultivated for rice. There was a CMAC base in the village next door to the Village Chief's house which initially housed approximately 150 male and female deminers who live in durable tents. However, many of the deminers had been redeployed to other mine affected areas before I arrived in the village and there were

around 50 male and female deminers living at the base while I was there. In terms of mine contamination, some of the villagers had their land cleared several years ago, some had had their land cleared more recently, and a few people had yet to have all their land cleared completely. The village therefore represented an ideal location in which to conduct my research as I could talk to people about their lives before clearance, after clearance and also about their experiences of living with the presence of landmines for several years. I was also able to observe the interaction between the villagers and the deminers who were responsible for making their land safe, and to interview some of the deminers about their lives and wellbeing while being based in the village.

Figure 7: Map of landmine contamination in the village



NB. The red diagonal lines denote areas of mine contamination

I lived in a building next to the Village Chief's house that was used as a kind of meeting room/storage room, and shared the living space with the two female primary school teachers, as well as various animals from time to time. Our room was at the back of the wooden building, which had a corrugated iron roof, making it hot when the sun shone and extremely noisy when it rained. We used the room to sleep and cook in, using locally produced charcoal, so at times it was very smoky, although as there were numerous holes in the walls, ventilation was not a problem. There was no bathroom and we bathed either at one of the village ponds or at the pump located just outside the building, using a bucket to draw up the muddy water. I had to become adept at bathing in a sarong very quickly as there was no privacy and I often had an audience. There was one double toilet shed in the compound which had been built by CMAC, which I shared with the deminers and various villagers. It was very much communal

living, and throughout my time in the village I did not have even a single hour on my own, which was not always easy to deal with.

Figure 8: My room in the village



Although I had undertaken Khmer language lessons for the two months that I was in Phnom Penh, my language skills were not at a level where I could hold in depth conversations with people, and so I engaged the services of a translator who lived and worked with me in the village. As a former VSO volunteer, when I arrived in Cambodia, I cultivated contacts with the VSO and AVI volunteers there, who formed an invaluable support network for me during my fieldwork. Not only did the volunteers I met become my friends, but they also helped me to learn more about living and working in Cambodia, as well as facilitating my search for a translator. Unsurprisingly, there were not many people who wanted to come and live in a remote rural mine contaminated village, and my options were therefore limited. My translator, Hean, was a 32-year-old Cambodian man who had grown up in a rural location in a different province, although he had gone to monk school in Battambang so was familiar with the region, but not the village itself. A Cambodian language assistant who had worked with a VSO volunteer in Battambang for many years recommended Hean to me, and although he had not been involved in a research project before, he was keen to learn and had a positive and respectful attitude towards everyone we met and talked with. That is not to say that we did not annoy each other from time to time, as living and working together for 24 hours, seven days a week would put a strain on any relationship, let alone on two people who had only met and talked for half an hour before moving into the village. Although it had been suggested that it might be better to recruit a local translator, the reality in the village was that if I had done so, my research would have been much more difficult to conduct as power, politics and the village

hierarchy play a major role in everyday life, and I believe that people would not have been as willing to share their stories with me in such depth if I had been accompanied by a local villager. In addition to that, there was only one person in the village who spoke enough English to fulfil that role, and his position within the community was precarious as he was already in conflict with the Village Chief, as well as being busy farming and supporting his family.

On arrival in the village I spent the first few days walking around and getting a feel for the place, introducing myself to the villagers. I had already spoken to CMAC staff to establish where the suspected mined areas were, so knew which areas to avoid. Hean and I also looked at the maps that had been compiled by the Village Chief that detailed households and landholding in order to familiarise ourselves with the layout of the village. The village itself ranged for 2 ½ km to the north, 2 km to the east and 1 ½ km to the west with houses located beside the main dirt roads that ran through the village. What struck me at the beginning of my time in the village was that individual dwellings seemed to be widely dispersed from each other and that the village did not seem to have any one particular place that could be described as the heart of the community. However, as time progressed and I observed village life I began to understand that the Village Chief's house acted as one central point, as did the pagoda at the northern end of the village, in addition to the area around the primary school which was half way between the Village Chief's house and the pagoda. The way that land had been distributed accounted for the strung out nature of the houses in the village. I learned that over time many different families had come to live in the area, but had left as the conditions were too harsh. There had therefore been a lot of changes in land ownership, and the availability of plots determined where houses were built. Observing and chatting to villagers I also began to understand that there were different enclaves of villagers who tended to be grouped by the original provinces that they had come from. These groups formed micro-communities within the village and there seemed to be a distinct demarcation between the different groups.

Throughout my fieldwork I kept a journal where I documented my observations and feelings, which was a useful way of processing my experiences and an invaluable record of events and daily life. Each morning at 4.30 am as the sun came up I sat outside under the tree with my coffee and wrote in my journal. Reflecting on what had happened the previous day and recording my thoughts on how my research was progressing provided me with a space to think about the direction I wanted to go in and specific avenues I wanted to pursue. Living within the community provided me with an opportunity to observe the workings of everyday life and to



gain an insight into the lives of the villagers. It also enabled me to build relationships with people, which was an important factor for my research. I had already found during my time in Cambodia that it took at least 2 months for a certain level of acceptance to be achieved, and at that point there was an almost tangible shift in the way people interacted with me. Once I had hit the 2-month mark, people started to be more open about their lives and experiences. It was almost as if there was suddenly a tacit understanding that I was no longer a transient tourist, but was really interested in learning from them about their lives and more generally the ways that society works in Cambodia. In the village, although I was made welcome from the moment I arrived, it was not until the 2 month point that I gained a certain degree of acceptance which meant that I was able to conduct more in-depth interviews with people I had got to know during that time.

Observing village life enabled me to map out the social hierarchy, which was also aided by being based at the Village Chief's compound. Nearly every day different villagers came to speak to the Village Chief, to seek his advice on domestic matters and disputes, or to gain permission to do certain things or to inform him about their movements. As noted in Chapter 3, Cambodia is a very hierarchical and patriarchal society. This was highly visible during my time in the village. The women deferred to the men and even when people obviously did not agree with some of the Village Chief's decisions, very few people challenged him. He also had deputies who because of their position were afforded a certain degree of power within the community. This became evident during the land titling process which took place while I was living in the village. Patron-client relationships were also very much in evidence with poorer villagers aligning themselves with richer and more powerful people in order to gain a measure of protection and security.

While I was living in the village in 2012, the Prime Minister, Hun Sen, launched a land-titling mission, hereafter referred to as the Mission, across the whole country. The aim of the mission was to redefine all land titles in the country, a highly contentious undertaking. All previous land titles were deemed invalid, and as such every landholder in the country had to travel to their plots and await the Mission staff's arrival for the new titling process. The Mission consisted of undergraduate university students in a uniform of army fatigues, and various people from the Ministry of Land and Environment, and in my region, the Forestry Department, who were charged with demarcating all land by measuring individual plots, supposedly in conjunction with the villagers, and then issuing new official land ownership titles. This resulted in numerous disputes over land not only in the village I was living in, but

across the Province, and indeed, the country. It also led to many people losing both small and significant amounts of land as the measurement process became increasingly political and biased towards those with more money and power with which to sway disputed outcomes, as I will discuss more fully in Chapter 6. The land titling process significantly affected the villagers' lives and wellbeing, in many cases negatively, as parts of their recently cleared land became the property of someone else, and their livelihoods were put at risk because they had little power and were too scared to challenge the decisions that the Mission made. When I left the village in early September the land titling Mission was still ongoing and many villagers had still not received official confirmation of land ownership. From something that had initially been viewed as positive, the process highlighted the difficulties inherent in land tenure in a country that is rife with corruption and where the rich and powerful gain what they want, when and where they want it.

Prior to commencing fieldwork it had been my intention to use a variety of participatory techniques to collect data drawn from the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tradition. As Chambers notes, PRA is used to describe "a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act." (1994: 1437). I had planned to use transect walks, community mapping, seasonal matrices and wealth ranking in order to engage the villagers with the research process. However, once I had arrived and spent some time in Cambodia, and then moved to the village, I decided that these methods were inappropriate, practically, ethically and morally, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, I had already established that building relationships of trust with individuals took time and effort. It was not until I had been in the village for some time that people began to accept me as more than an itinerant tourist, but instead as someone who was truly interested in hearing their stories and learning about their experiences. I therefore chose to concentrate on walking and cycling around the village, stopping to chat along the way with various people so that the villagers got used to my presence, rather than using PRA methods, as I felt that these would undermine the relationships I was trying to develop with the villagers.

Secondly, as Cornwall and Pratt note, "As participatory development has come to draw upon an ever-broader spectrum of methodological possibilities, PRA and its aliases have become just one small component in processes that are multi-faceted, in which participation is not simply about generating knowledge and information, but complex sequences of engagement in

different institutional interfaces and spaces.” (2010:19). This is an important point and highlights that PRA techniques are not the only way of engaging with a population in a participatory way. For me, living with the villagers and engaging in everyday activities such as carrying water, and visiting the pagoda gave me the opportunity to interact with the villagers, and become, in some small way part of the community. This, I believe was a much more participatory approach to fieldwork than using PRA methods to gather information. While there is a definite place for PRA methods, particularly within development practice when working with communities to identify issues and subsequently to design projects to address these, I question the appropriateness of its use within academic research. The villagers had not been involved in the design of my research and the outcome would not be the implementation of a development project that would improve their lives. While the findings from this thesis could be used to inform future mine action projects, the villagers themselves would not receive any immediate benefits. In addition, using, for example wealth ranking, would only be a useful activity for me as a way of mapping the community structure. To my mind, asking people to rank households in terms of wealth was an unnecessarily intrusive way of obtaining information that the villagers were already well aware of. As such I weighed up the practical, ethical and moral reasons for and against the use of PRA methods. I concluded that as I was the only person who would find these activities useful, it was ethically inappropriate to include them as part of my fieldwork.

Thirdly, I learned that the villagers had already engaged in a number of different PRA activities with different organizations that had come to the village, and were, to coin a phrase, ‘PRA-ed out’. This PRA fatigue prompted me to reflect on why I was considering using these methods and what benefits the villagers would actually get, if any, from taking part in these activities. I concluded that although it would be useful for me to gather information in this way, ethically I could not justify asking the villagers to participate in activities that they had done many times before, and that, as far as they were concerned, had little value. In addition, as Jassey notes, “PRA takes a lot of valuable time from hard-working people” (2003: 96). On a practical note, the villagers were busy working their fields and trying to sustain a living, and did not necessarily have time or even want to take part in activities that they had undertaken many times before. Instead I chose to immerse myself in village life as much as possible, which was in keeping with the ethnographic approach to fieldwork I was taking, and to use observation and interviews in order to gain an insight into the lives and wellbeing of the people living there.

During my time in the village I documented all my observations, from the mundane to the extraordinary and talked through any questions or queries I had with Hean. It was sometimes difficult trying to blend in to the background, as I was very much an object of curiosity and at any village meetings or events I would invariably be surrounded by groups of people who were keen to meet and talk to me. The most abiding topic of conversation revolved around my eating habits and whether or not I could eat rice. There was also a lot of discussion about the differences in farming between the UK and Cambodia and a certain amount of incredulity about the fact that rice is not grown here.

In addition to observation I used semi-structured interviews as another method of gathering data. In total I conducted fifty interviews with individuals and households in the village, with Hean acting as translator. Once I had familiarised myself with the village lay out, I began interviewing the villagers, starting with the houses near the VC's compound on the dirt track leading out of the village. I had decided that I would use an informal interview style that tried to set people at ease, rather than adopting a more formal questionnaire type of interview. This was because the villagers were wary of anything that looked official, and, in addition, I wanted to make the interviews as free flowing as possible so that the villagers could speak about issues that were important to them. I had certain topics that I wanted to cover during the interviews, which included peoples' reasons for coming to the village, their experiences of living in a place contaminated with landmines, what they felt was important for their lives and wellbeing and the changes they had seen during their time in the village following the arrival of CMAC and the onset of clearance. However, although I had a rough interview strategy, I did not use a specific interview guide or particular questions, but intuitively conducted the interviews, making sure that these subject areas as well as other topics the villagers wanted to speak about were covered.

I began each meeting with a new person by introducing myself and Hean, explaining my research and reason for being in the village before obtaining consent. After asking some basic demographic questions including household size, names and ages, I generally moved on to ask the interviewee(s) how long they had been in the village and how they had come to live there. This invariably led on to a discussion of what it was like in the village when they moved there, and their experiences of moving to an area that was heavily contaminated with landmines. I asked the interviewees how their lives were affected by the presence of mines and the way that they felt during that time. We then moved on to their present day, and the changes they had seen after CMAC had begun clearance and the difference that this had made to their lives.

In effect, many of the interviews were mini life histories that documented the interviewees' lives before moving to the village, their experiences of living with landmines and the things that were important for their lives and wellbeing. I should add here that initially I utilised the WeD technique of asking people what was important to live well in that place, which had produced a list of things covering different aspects of people's lives (Camfield 2006). However, after several attempts at this, I abandoned this approach as the villagers I interviewed told me that the only things important for their lives were land, rice and family. Instead I gently probed for further information about what they valued and needed for life to be good during discussions of their past and present experiences in the village, and in this way, was able to build up a composite picture of what wellbeing meant for the villagers. At the end of each interview I asked if the interviewee had any questions or would like to discuss anything else. Land ownership was a frequently raised topic of conversation, which enabled me to ask questions about how much land they held, the crops that they grew, any difficulties they faced, and how they coped when the harvest was poor. This assisted me in mapping out the community structure, the distribution of wealth, and the social hierarchy, which was based around the amount of land owned, patron-client relationships as well as sex and age.

During the interviews I learned that the Cambodian language can be interpreted in a variety of ways and that direct questions do not always evoke direct answers. For example, one man chose to answer a question about the purpose of the Village Association (VA) by using an analogy of a coconut tree. He painted a vivid picture of the tree needing time to take root and grow before any fruit was born, which was how he visualised the VA developing. Some villagers talked freely about their lives with very few prompts, while others preferred to answer questions that I asked. There were a few teething troubles with the translation initially, despite the fact that I had carefully explained the purpose of my research and the way that I wanted Hean to translate. I vividly remember one of the first interviews we conducted with a woman who spoke for some time and when I asked Hean what she had said, he told me that she was just talking about her life. To which I replied that that was exactly what I was interested in. Needless to say, all subsequent interviews were translated in a lot more detail. However, I was aware that I was missing a number of nuances during the interviews, as my language skills were not advanced enough to understand everything that was being said. Simultaneous translation is not an easy job, and it was frustrating knowing that what was being said was being filtered by Hean. We came to have a good working relationship in the end, but this took time to develop and although I could not have undertaken this phase of my

research without him, I would have much preferred to talk directly to people, rather than through a third party.

Using a translator did raise issues of power. Hean had a certain status because of his association with me, a white western woman staying in the village as a guest. However, Hean also had power over me and could choose when to reveal or withhold information. Often villagers would come and talk to him about certain aspects of their lives as he represented an outsider who they could discuss their situations with. A number of times he would wait for a couple of days before telling me certain snippets of information, and when I heard about something that had happened via someone else, he always questioned my knowledge, which was immensely frustrating. We discussed this, and came to an understanding about the best way to work with each other, and agreed that if either of us were unhappy about a situation, we would talk about it and come to a solution. It was not easy for Hean in the village. He missed his family and friends and there were times when he struggled to deal with certain situations, particularly when he came under pressure to join in with the drinking in the village. He did not enjoy alcohol, and was also a diabetic, so had to be careful about what he ate and drank. However, as he did not want to reveal this weakness to other people, he had difficulties continually finding excuses not to join in, particularly when asked by people in positions of authority. He was open with me about his political views, although had to keep these hidden during his time in the village, as it would have made his position untenable. We spoke privately, usually while cycling or walking round the village about things that had happened and he often expressed his disappointment and concern at the level of corruption and the way that people behaved and lived in the village.

One of the first interviews I conducted was with the Village Chief (VC), firstly because it was politic to do so, and secondly, as one of the founding members of the village, he would be able to provide me with valuable insights into the development and make-up of the village, its residents and some of the issues that they may have been facing. During the interview he identified five families who had come to the village at the same time as him and this enabled me to initially target these people as good sources of knowledge about the way that the village had changed over time, both in terms of physical landscape, mine contamination and clearance, but also socially and politically. Combining information from the VC, subsequent discussions with members of the first five families in the village and using my own observations I was able to develop an interview guide that began by asking people about their lives at the moment, before moving on to talk about why and how they had come to the

village, why, how they felt when they first arrived, what changes they had seen, the things that were important for life to be good for them and finally moving on to talk about the future. It was a fairly fluid guide and allowed the interviewees some freedom to choose what they wanted to talk about and when, but proved invaluable as a way of making sure that there was some form of continuity between the whole interview data set. I made sure that I reviewed the notes from each interview every day and tried to confirm the information I had gathered through cross-checking with other interviews, and comparing the similarities and differences alongside other information I had gathered whilst talking to villagers more informally. Often villagers spoke about their neighbours and in this way I was able to verify what had been said by a number of interviewees as their stories generally tallied with accounts provided by other people. However, it should be noted here, that as I was concerned with exploring what wellbeing means for the villagers on an individual level, initially, before building up a more composite picture of the community, I did take what people told me, to a certain extent, at face value as it related specifically to their subjective feelings about their situations.

I also spent a lot of time hanging out in three of the hubs of the village: the VCs compound, the shop near the school and the pagoda. Here I would observe the comings and goings of village life, and specifically at the pagoda found that people seemed more relaxed and felt comfortable coming to join me for a chat. Invariably we covered numerous interesting subjects that additionally helped me to identify other questions that I could use during interviews that ranged from spirituality to the reasons behind the lack of rain (angry gods and deforestation) and everything in between. I formed a strong friendship with the head monk during my time in the village, and spent many hours in his company, not only because we were friends, but also because I found that the pagoda was one of the very few places in the village that I was able to relax, and occasionally reflect on life, my research and my next steps. He also helped me to identify people to interview, some of whom were fascinating, particularly the former Khmer Rouge soldier who had had five wives, who I may not otherwise have met. The monk was also a great source of information about what was happening in the village, as the older woman who came to the pagoda to worship and to look after the monks there were always gossiping and passing on snippets of news, some of which the monk passed on to me. Sitting and eating ice cream at the shop, which was actually shavings from a block of ice covered with sugar syrup and condensed milk served in a glass, was also another useful observation point and I had many interesting discussions with not only the shop keeper, his current wife and his ex-wife, who all lived together, but also with the numerous people who would pop in to buy essentials such as small plastic bags of cooking oil, cigarettes, beer, vegetables and the odd

balloon for the children. It was also a way of distancing myself from the power dynamics inherent with living in the VCs compound, and gave people an opportunity to approach me in a different setting, slightly removed from the ever watchful eyes of the VCs wife and her cronies.

I was keen to document village life not only through interviews, discussions and observation, but also visually. I waited for two months before beginning to take photographs around the village, as I wanted people to get used to my presence, usually riding around on my clapped out bicycle, stopping and chatting to people. I was aware that materially people had very little and I did not want to flaunt my obvious comparative wealth. I had already found out that every time I left the village some people would invariably go through all my things while I was away, so I did not want to publicise the equipment I had with me any more than necessary. When I began photographing village life, which was on the day of the first rain bringing ceremony, a combination of animist, Buddhist and Hindu practices, I found that people wanted to be included in the pictures and far from shying away from the camera, people wanted to pose and be involved. From then on every time I interviewed an individual or family, I asked their permission to take a picture and then presented them to the individuals and families as a keepsake once I had had them printed out during my trips to Battambang.

Figure 9: Rain bringing ceremony



As Banks notes, “Visual methods can reveal what was supposed to be concealed, or that which had been unanticipated.” (2007: 33). Although there is a growing interest in visual methods (Bryman 2008), in the past, much qualitative research has focused on the analysis of the spoken and written word, leading to the marginalisation of image-based data in the social sciences (Emmison & Smith 2000). However, as Lacey notes, “Of all our senses, it is sight that gives us the most detailed information.” (1998: 5), and I therefore decided to incorporate a



visual element into the research project in order to explore the way that people construct meaning about their lives not only through the things that they hear and say, but also by what they see. As such, I decided to use auto-photography and photo elicitation interviews as part of the research design.

Prosser and Schwartz note that although photographs do not provide an unbiased and objective source of data, they can “...Show characteristic attributes of people, objects and events that often elude even the most skilled wordsmiths. Through our use of photographs we can discover and demonstrate relationships that may be subtle or easily overlooked. We can communicate the feeling or suggest the emotion imparted by activities, environments and interactions. And we can provide a degree of tangible details, a sense of being there and a way of knowing that may not readily translate into other symbolic modes of communication.” (1998:116). By asking the research participants in the Khmer community to photograph aspects of their lives that were important, and then using these photographs as the basis for photo elicitation interviews, the aim was to provide participants with a space to tell their stories in the words and pictures of their own choosing.

Auto or participatory photography is a method whereby the researcher tries to “See the world through someone else’s eyes.” (Thomas 2009:1) and “...Provides a tool in qualitative and ethnographic research projects that moves a step toward understanding what qualities of environments and places are important for research subjects in their daily lives.” (2009:1). In this way it can be deemed a more participatory approach to research as it actively engages the participants in the research process and the production of knowledge (Thomas 2009). By offering the participants the opportunity to decide which photographs to take, and which aspects of their lives to document, the power differential between the participants and myself was reduced. In addition, as Noland notes, “Photographs are used as tools to help identify what people value, what images they prefer, how they define their world, and how they picture others. Photographs can represent the photographer’s own view of what is important and thus are visual rhetoric.” (2006:4).

It was also at the two-month point that I began the participatory photography project with certain villagers. The aim of this activity was to capture wellbeing through their eyes and to see how a visual representation of the things important to their lives and wellbeing would be explained and discussed during their narrative accounts. In total ten people took part in this part of the research, five men and five women of various ages ranging from 24 to 68. I had

noticed in the household interviews that the women tended to be more reserved and less articulate than the men and so I wanted to see if using photographs and taking a different approach would result in richer data. The participants included a man injured by a landmine, a monk, people who had lived in the village for several years and those who had arrived in the village more recently. I simply asked the participants to take photographs of things that were important to their lives and wellbeing and then discussed the images with them in ensuing photo-elicitation interviews. Despite the differences in sex and age, there were some marked similarities between the photographs that were taken and the discussions we had about their lives and wellbeing, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Living in a remote rural village with no electricity meant that I had a number of things to take into consideration before starting the participatory photography. Firstly, should I use digital or disposable cameras, and secondly, if I chose to opt for the digital ones how would I charge them or alternatively would I be able to purchase cameras that ran on batteries? In the end after several discussions with other people who had undertaken photography projects in Cambodia, I opted for digital battery run cameras which I purchased second hand relatively inexpensively in Battambang. This meant that participants could take as many photographs as they wanted to and could instantly see the results. It also meant that the images could be uploaded onto my computer and I had the option of conducting the ensuing photo elicitation interviews using my computer. In reality, this did not work very well as the participants were much more comfortable having hard copies of the photographs which they could flick through. In the end I printed out all of the photographs that the participants took and gave them to the individuals as a small thank you for taking part.

Talking about wellbeing can be an emotional experience, as you are asking people to think about their lives and which invariably brings to the fore the challenges and difficulties that they are facing. Taking photographs proved to be an enjoyable and positive experience for all of the participants, and the one-to-one interviews I then conducted with the photographers proved both interesting and informative. As Collier and Collier argue, "Because photographs are examined by the anthropologist and informants together, the informants are relieved of the stress of being the *subject* of the interrogation. Instead their role can be one of expert guides leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures. Photographs allow them to tell their own stories spontaneously. This usually elicits a flow of information about personalities, places, processes and artefacts." (1986:106). In addition, "Photographs often make informants more precise in their interview information." (Collier 2001:45). The aim here

was to lessen any awkwardness at the beginning of the interview by providing a focus for the participants (Clark-Ibanez 2004) and to use the images initially for a focused discussion before moving on to wider concepts and issues (Banks 2007). By providing a safe space where participants could talk about their lives, invariably in the homes of the participants at a time and date of their choosing, most photo-elicitation interviews were relatively free of interruptions and the participants appeared to be comfortable discussing their lives and wellbeing with me. As the villagers began to speak about the images, I would ask questions, and together we would jointly construct meaning of what we were seeing through discussion (Harper 2002), making this aspect of the research a more collaborative process.

During the photo-elicitation interviews I found that the power differential between myself and the villagers was reduced or perhaps, reversed, would be more accurate. Instead of me guiding the interview, the participants talked through the images in the order that they wanted to, and explained why they had taken specific photographs and what they meant in terms of their lives and wellbeing. This resulted in an almost three-dimensional discussion of wellbeing that simultaneously incorporated past and present realities as well as aspirations for the future. There was also an inter-weaving between material, subjective and relational aspects of their wellbeing, which was fascinating, and in stark contrast to the much more linear discussions of wellbeing that took place during the individual and household interviews. Introducing the visual element of this project therefore resulted in a different lens through which to view wellbeing that was very much through the eyes of the villagers. Although I had worried that the participants would find it difficult to take images of more abstract aspects of their wellbeing such as agency or participation, this proved not to be the case. Despite the images being predominantly of physical objects such as fields of rice, cows, farm equipment, water and so on, when they talked about the pictures, the participants were able to articulate a much greater depth of meaning to the images than the initial literal interpretation that led to a more holistic discussion of their lives and wellbeing.

## **5.7 Ethical considerations:**

To my mind, it is imperative to consider the ethical implications of my actions and decisions, and the way the research is conducted throughout the project, rather than as a tick box form that needs to be completed before fieldwork begins. As a reflexive person I constantly evaluate the way I behave, act and speak, and the same consideration was given to the way I conducted my research. One of the key ethical considerations that underpins this project is that of Do No Harm (Anderson 1999). In every aspect of this project I tried to minimise any

potential harm to participants and to myself, and at all times I remained sensitive to the impact that my research and my presence as a researcher was having on any given setting.

Throughout the project, I tried to ensure that the six principles outlined in the ESRC (2010) ethical framework were fully adhered to, which are:

- Ensuring the quality and integrity of my research;
- Seeking and obtaining informed consent;
- Respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of my research participants;
- Ensuring the voluntary participation of participants in the study;
- Avoiding harm to my participants; and
- Showing that my research is independent and impartial.

All participants were fully informed about the research project and their free and voluntary consent obtained. I made sure that each person I interviewed was told, either directly by me or through my translator, Hean, that they had the right to withdraw from the project at any time without having to give a reason and that they did not have to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with. In addition, during times when people became obviously distressed and upset, which did happen on occasion with some interviewees in the village, I immediately paused the interviews, allowed the person time to compose themselves, and then asked them if they wanted to stop or to continue the discussion. Without exception, every interviewee continued with the interview.

I employed different strategies for obtaining the consent of the various project participants. For English speaking mine action actors, I supplied a project information sheet prior to interview, detailing the aims and objectives of the study. Participants read this before signing the consent form, and I encouraged each interviewee to ask any questions that they had before, during or after the interview. I recorded each of these interviews on a digital recorder after having obtained consent to do so from the interviewees. Anonymity of participants posed a quandary for me, as there are a limited number of people working in mine action worldwide, and even less in Cambodia specifically. This meant that it would be difficult for me to disguise who my participants were through pseudonyms alone if I decided to name the organisations they worked for. In the end I decided only to name CMAC as it is the national mine action agency and has a much larger number of staff than the international mine action organisations

working in the country. This allowed me to protect the identities of my participants in this phase of the fieldwork.

The interviews in the village were more informal in most cases than the mine action actor ones, and I took detailed notes during each interview because people were wary of being recorded, therefore making it inappropriate to use the digital recorder. There was also a fear of signing official-looking documents, and in a number of cases, the villagers I talked to were illiterate, so I obtained informed consent verbally from the participants, after carefully explaining through Hean what I was doing in the village and the purpose of my research. I anonymised each interviewee at the time of interview, assigning a pseudonym while note taking, and made sure that Hean fully understood the need to maintain confidentiality of all of the data.

As most of the fieldwork was undertaken in Cambodia, I made sure that I conducted the research in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner. Due consideration was given to the social, cultural and legal norms of Cambodia and at all times I behaved in an ethical, sensitive and reflexive manner. Previous experience of living and working with vulnerable communities in South East Asia has made me aware of the importance of being open about my reasons for being there, and not to make promises that I cannot keep. From the outset, I explicitly stated that the aim of the research project was to create a space for participants to tell their stories in order to gain a better understanding of the issues facing communities living with landmines, and that unfortunately I did not have the means or resources to assist in changing their everyday situation.

The auto-photography aspect of the project required participants to take photographs of aspects of their lives that are important to them. As the participants took photos of both the place in which they lived and the people who live with them, I made sure that in addition to the participants consent, I also obtained the consent of the subjects of the photos before including the photographs in the final thesis.

Finally, as this project is concerned with the impact that mines have on the wellbeing of communities, by necessity, part of the fieldwork took place in a mine-affected region. By working with national mine action actors I ensured that I was fully briefed about the mine contamination situation in the village on arrival, and had access to a map that clearly showed which parts of the village were still considered as suspected hazardous areas. At no time did I

put my participants or myself in physical danger, and ensured that data generation activities were confined within the boundaries of the de-mined areas of the village in order to maintain the safety of all participants.

### **5.8 Ethical Challenges:**

During my time in the village I faced a number of ethical challenges and dilemmas, which I feel are important to document here. The first of these relates to the information that people shared with me, much of which was emotionally charged and highly sensitive, and related to their past, present and plans for the future. At times I found it very difficult to listen to some of the experiences that the villagers shared with me without becoming emotionally involved, particularly when they spoke about their time living under the Khmer Rouge regime, or those who were suffering because they had had their land grabbed or did not have enough money to buy food to support their families. However, I reminded myself that the participants had chosen to relate these experiences to me, and in effect I was providing a safe space for them to talk about their concerns without fear of prejudice or judgement. I constantly questioned the impact that I was having on the interviewees, the questions I asked and the way that I dealt, both on the surface, and internally with the responses they gave. No one wants to be pitied, and I made sure that even if I was horrified internally by some of the things that some interviewees told me, my facial features did not betray what I was feeling, as, at the end of the day, this was not about me and my reaction to what was being said, but was instead a time for the interviewees to express themselves in the way of their own choosing. One woman in the village broke down in tears while relating how helpless she felt, how her husband beat her and her children, how she was fearful that someone would come and grab her land from her and how utterly hopeless she felt because she did not know how she would survive, before breaking down in tears and sobbing. I sat and held her hand and waited until she had no more tears to shed, and was somewhat surprised when she then thanked me for listening, told me that she knew I could not do anything about her situation, but that it had helped just being able to talk to someone about what was going on in her life.

In general I visited people in the village in their own homes where I was able to observe their living situations, as well as conduct the interviews in a setting that they were comfortable and familiar with. However, this raised the ethical issue of conducting private conversations in public spaces. Invariably when interviewing people in their own homes, other members of their families would come and join in, and in some cases, their neighbours and other villagers who were passing by that had seen me going to the house. How then was I to maintain

confidentiality? What I found was that communal living was the norm in the village and that most people were happy discussing their personal lives in front of others, even if it made me feel uncomfortable. I decided that if the villagers were comfortable talking in front of others, then this was their choice, although the most in-depth interviews took place when we were able to negotiate a more private time and place. Towards the end of every interview I asked if the participants had any questions or had anything that they wanted to talk about, and in many cases, this led to some fascinating discussions on unexpected topics.

It soon became clear that drinking alcohol was a major pastime for a number of people in the village which led to some difficulties for me both in terms of conducting my research, but on a more personal level, dealing with everyday life. On several occasions I visited peoples' houses in the mornings at around 8 am, only to find that they were already drunk. This raised a conundrum for me: when is a person too drunk to be interviewed about their wellbeing? If I interviewed someone who was totally drunk, would they reveal things that they would not have said had they been sober, and ethically, was it acceptable to do so? I decided early on that I would not interview people who were drunk, but would try to come back and visit them at another time when they were relatively sober. In some cases this meant that I did not interview certain individuals at all because they drank every day from the time they woke up until the time they fell down drunk and were taken home, usually sandwiched between two people on a moped or draped across the shoulders of a friend. Both men and women drank and for me it was particularly uncomfortable as a lot of the drinking took place at the Village Chief's compound, where I lived.

The drinking often led to violence and I witnessed numerous physical fights predominantly between men, although I was informed on several occasions that there was also a lot of domestic violence which was fuelled by alcohol. Watching the children playing in the yard of the Village Chief's compound also gave me an insight into relationships in the children's homes. There was a lot of play fighting that was incredibly vicious with the bigger and stronger children dominating the smaller ones and there was one incident that was particularly disturbing where two older boys were obviously playing some kind of prisoner/guard scenario with a small girl who they made stand in the middle of the road with her eyes downcast while they prodded her with sticks and refused to let her move until they said so. There was also parental violence against children, which most people sat back and watched, as invariably this was played out in the communal setting of the village. This ranged from light smacks through to full blown prolonged beatings with sticks. Violence seemed to simmer just below the

surface and quickly came to the fore when tempers flared, which happened frequently during my time in the village, although in most instances the incidents were short-lived as other villagers would step in to calm the situation down. On a personal level, this meant that on a number of occasions I had to make an ethical decision about whether or not to intervene. On the one hand I was a guest in the village, staying within the confines of the VCs compound, a researcher, an observer who was there to watch, listen and learn, not someone trying to bring my own cultural values and judgements to the situation in order to change it. As such, if I intervened, it might have resulted in more harm being done in the long run, as those concerned may have lost face, something that is avoided at all costs by the majority of Khmer people. On the other hand I have very strong moral beliefs about violence being unjustified at any time, and could not sit by and watch, for example, a child being viciously beaten with a large stick for some trivial reason by a woman who was obviously taking out her own frustrations with life against him. There are laws in Cambodia outlining the prohibition of domestic violence and violence against children, although some of the people living in the village seemed to have a complete disregard for them. In the end I took each incident on its own merit, some of which I intervened in directly and others where I used a more indirect form of intervention that usually involved talking to either the spiritual leader of the village who then talked to the people involved in the incident or to other external authorities who were better placed to discuss these issues with those concerned. At times I found it very difficult to contain my own anger at some of the injustices that I witnessed, which will be further documented in the next section of the chapter.

Having outlined some of the ethical dilemmas I faced during fieldwork, it is now time to consider my role as a researcher before moving on to reflect on my fieldwork experience and how living in a contaminated landscape affected my own wellbeing.

### **5.9 Reflexivity and my role as a researcher:**

I would like to acknowledge here that as a researcher, I am not value-neutral but rather consider myself to be a product of my lived experiences, which are tempered by the social and cultural systems in which I am and have been embedded. To this end, although I made every effort to retain some measure of objectivity, ultimately this thesis reflects my own subjective interpretation of the situation. Having said this, I remained open and transparent throughout the project, and actively listened to the views of all participants without prejudice or judgment. I have also endeavoured to present the findings of this research in a balanced manner that accurately reflects as far as possible the multiple perspectives of the various



research interviewees. It should be noted here that although the aim is to include multiple perspectives of the situation, not all stakeholders were incorporated into the project sample, such as landmine manufacturers or donors, and the vantage points presented are by necessity, limited in that respect.

#### **5.10 Reflections on fieldwork: my wellbeing in a contaminated landscape:**

One of the things that surprised me most about my time in the village was how quickly I became used to living in a mine-contaminated landscape. It never became normalised, but it was easy to forget about the presence of mines as I went about my daily business of interviewing people and conducting my research, which gave me a slight insight into how the villagers coped with the situation day in, day out. It was only when I cycled past an area that was being demined or heard about new mines being found in fields by villagers that it brought it back to the forefront of my mind. One day I was forcibly reminded that I was living with landmines when a large explosion nearly caused me to fall off my bicycle as I was cycling to visit a villager. I shouted across to the man who ran the karaoke shack, and he told me not to worry, CMAC were just detonating mines so that a foreign journalist could take pictures of the process. It was, however, still a frightening experience as at the time I assumed that a villager had set off a mine while working in a field, rather than it being a staged explosion.

Although there was a lot of laughter during my time in the village, and for the main part it was a fascinating, positive, interesting and challenging experience, there was a marked deterioration in my wellbeing while I was there, which was due to a number of different factors. Despite outward appearances, I am an introvert and as such need time alone to reflect on the happenings of the world around me. Communal living was therefore extremely difficult for me as I was never alone and did not have even a single hour on my own to process all of the information I was gathering or the interactions I had had with different people. To counteract this, I took fairly regular trips, at least once a month, to Battambang, where I could close myself away, eat good food, enjoy the comforts of a private bathroom, a proper bed and a fan, and recharge my batteries. Although we ate relatively well in comparison to many of the villagers, the diet of rice, rice and more rice was difficult to digest, and I began to lose weight at quite a rate. Every day during my stay in Cambodia, be it in Phnom Penh, Battambang, the village or other places I visited, people commented on my appearance and wanted to know how my skin remained so fair and what I ate to make me so tall and fat. This was not just because I was a foreigner, but seemed to be the norm for most Cambodian people who felt the need to comment on other peoples' appearances. Chatting to the primary school teachers

one day about which boys they thought were handsome I was surprised to learn that they would not consider dating one of the young men because his skin was quite dark and he was therefore considered ugly. Unsurprisingly then, landmine survivors who had sustained injuries from explosions were objects of derision and discrimination against them is rife, an ugly and unwelcome facet of Cambodian culture today. Any difference is highlighted and derided and was one aspect of living in Cambodia that I found extremely trying.

I also caught dengue fever while I was in the village. Luckily I was able to go to Battambang and subsequently to hospital in Phnom Penh for treatment, while many children and some adults in the village were not so lucky. It was awful seeing small children lying on the floor in their bamboo houses with a drip held up by a stick that had been attached by a semi-trained nurse in the next village, knowing that I could do nothing to help. Although the dengue fever left me feeling very fatigued for months afterwards, and slightly hampered my ability to cycle round as much of the village as I would have liked, it had no long term ill effects. Other diseases were also prevalent in the village, most notably TB, which has been increasing in Cambodia in recent years. There was also one incident during my time in the village which seriously upset not only myself, but also many of the villagers. A young boy died from food poisoning after his father picked a vegetable that he thought was edible, fed his whole family with it as they had nothing else to eat, and the subsequently had to watch his son die in his arms. CMAC had taken the family to the nearest hospital 55 km away in one of their trucks, but were too late to get the boy medical attention. The rest of the family did recover, but it was a tragedy that could have been prevented if the family had even a little money to buy enough food. It was a shocking and upsetting incident, which was brought home in no uncertain terms when I was asked to go and visit the family after the funeral by one of their neighbours. Seeing the remaining siblings wailing and crying and watching the silent tears of the father was nearly too much to bear. As I was leaving the family tried to offer me some food to take home with me and thanked me for caring enough to come and visit them. That was heart breaking to hear and I left quite quickly so that the family did not see my tears, which I shed in relative privacy cycling home.

This relates to another issue I struggled with during my time in the village: seeing, but not doing. It is in my nature to fight injustices and to simply observe rather than to formulate a response to obvious need within the community went against every fibre of my being. Having worked in international development on a variety of projects, finding myself in the role of researcher was something that I had not considered in enough depth before embarking on fieldwork. Living within a community who materially have very little was not, in itself a

hardship for me, but not being able to develop solutions with the community to some of the problems that the villagers were obviously facing proved very difficult indeed. In addition, seeing the obvious and in some cases, quite overt corruption was difficult to process, particularly when it produced such visible injustices and difficulties for some of the people. On a number of occasions, villagers I had got to know quite well would ask for my advice on how to go about things, specifically if they had ideas about a community project that they wanted to obtain funding for. In one case I was invited to lunch with NY in order to talk to some visiting foreigners from a development organisation that were funding a small communal farming project run by the newly established Village Association. NY asked me to talk to the representatives to see if there were any more funds available as he did not feel confident enough to do so himself. He had gone to great lengths to provide meat for their lunch, a rare treat, and to make everything ready for their arrival. However, it turned out that the foreigners who visited had no authority to grant additional monies, but were, in reality, three young French 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduates who were in Cambodia volunteering with the organisation for 3 months and were going to a different village each day to try out a new activity. On that day they tried, and failed, to build a chicken house, ate the lunch and then got on the back of the mopeds they had come on and rode off into the sunset. This then, for me, was development tourism at its very worst. The young men had no idea how much trouble the villagers had taken to make sure that they felt welcome or how much they were pinning their hopes on the visit. It highlighted the total lack of consideration and communication that had taken place between the NGO and the local community, and made me extremely angry, but powerless to do anything about it. In the end I came to terms with my position as a researcher by offering advice when asked, and making sure that I reported back to my CMAC key informant about the situation in the village, as he had links with a variety of different organisations who may have been able to work with the community to instigate the projects that they wanted.

My experience in the village, and in Cambodia more generally, and the way that people responded to me were influenced by me being a white Western woman. On the one hand I was of an age that automatically meant that I received a certain amount of respect, in addition to having status as a foreigner. On the other hand, I did not have a husband or children and was therefore an object of pity, and some confusion, I might add. As one of the first questions that people asked me was are you married? which came after, why are you so fat?, how old are you? and how many children do you have? I decided that I needed to come up with an answer that they were not expecting as I was becoming tired of the looks of pity and the obvious concern for marital status when it was revealed that I lived on my own. So, as the

monk had done a numerology reading for me, and had told me that if I stopped focusing so much on work and started focusing more on having fun I would marry next year, each time I was asked if I was married, I replied that no, not yet, but the monk has told me it will be next year! This usually caused much laughter and alleviated the need for people to worry for me, or continue to question me about my personal life, which was something of a relief. The longer I stayed in the village, and the more I got to know people, the braver they became about asking about my life back home. One elderly woman asked me if I would be cycling back to England, and on a more serious note, there were several occasions when various women tried to give or sell me their children to take back with me. One woman semi-jokingly suggested, after a discussion with a group of women at the pagoda about how much luggage I could take onto the plane, that I leave all my clothes with her, and instead pack her granddaughter in my suitcase, as she didn't weigh more than 20 kgs. Although she was not serious about this, there were times when it was clear that some of the women would have been very happy for me to take on one of their many children, but whether this was to give them a better life in the West or to ease the burden on the family of another mouth to feed, I was never quite sure.

Although I enjoyed undertaking my fieldwork and found the majority of encounters with the people I met fascinating, there were times when the information that people gave me was difficult to process and digest, particularly when it related to the misdeeds of others that resulted in misfortune for those around them and the very hard times that people had experienced during their lives. Corruption was rife and I had heard many tales about different people in the village who had caused trouble, alongside heart-breaking stories of loss, pain and the darker side of life in Cambodia. Listening to these experiences did eventually take its toll on me and I found myself becoming increasingly angry and upset at the injustices that had and continued to take place in the village and across the country. It was only after I left the village that I was able to gain some perspective, distancing myself geographically, mentally and emotionally in order to process the onslaught of information I had received. This took time, much mental processing, a counselling session and a lot of soul searching before I came to terms with what I had seen, experienced and heard, and was able to formulate a plan as to how best to portray all of this information in a way that would adequately and meaningfully reflect and represent the people who had shared part of their lives with me. On a more positive note, I had word from a friend at CMAC after I had left the village, and just before I returned to the UK, that several women in the village went to talk to him during one of his visits and asked after me. They told him that they missed me and wanted to know if I would ever return to the village as I was very different from any other foreigner that they had met

not only because I had lived and stayed in the village, but also because I had treated everyone with respect and had listened to what they wanted to say. This gave me a sense that for the main part I had achieved what I had wanted to achieve in the village, and to a small degree had become an accepted part of community life, if only for a short space of time. The knowledge that I had been viewed as a person who treated people kindly, with dignity and respect helped me to then reflect on my time in the village in a more positive way that acknowledged the hardships and difficulties that people faced while countering that with the amount of fun, laughter and enjoyment of life that I had shared with many of the villagers during my time there. The abiding lesson I take from this is that wellbeing happens very much in relationship and it is the people around you that can make an enormous difference to how you subjectively view your own quality of life.

#### **5.11 Concluding Thoughts:**

This chapter has outlined the methodology for my research project and has documented the highs and lows of what was, in effect, a very steep learning curve for me. By adopting a bricolage approach that allows for greater adaptability and flexibility throughout my fieldwork and indeed the project as a whole, I have been able to remain true to who I am as a researcher and as a person. The different qualitative data generation methods provided me with an opportunity to explore how visual methods can deepen verbal accounts and how multiple perspectives and understandings intersect within a particular situation. Despite the challenges of fieldwork, I believe that I was able to achieve much of what I set out to do. Accessing a variety of different people from mine action country directors to local mine affected villagers assisted me in gathering a number of different perspectives and understandings of the ways that the presence of landmines impacts on the wellbeing of affected populations, which the following chapters will discuss in detail.

## **Chapter Six: Mine action perspective**

Mine action is a sector in transition. Originally viewed as a stand-alone activity designed to alleviate the immediate threat that landmines pose to civilian populations, mine action is now being encouraged to integrate into the wider humanitarian and development spheres by donors seeking to provide a more cohesive approach to the recovery of post-conflict societies. Driven by the Ottawa Treaty that decrees total landmine clearance of affected countries, mine action organisations are increasingly under pressure to balance meeting the needs of affected populations against national government mine action strategies, while satisfying donor conditions and ensuring the agreed Treaty quota of mine clearance is met. Mine action actors are therefore precariously positioned in multiple distinct but overlapping environments with the difficult task of attempting to satisfy the manifold agendas of the various stakeholders involved in clearing the land of mines.

This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with a variety of international and national mine action actors working in organisation management, project management, technical clearance and community development, and provides an insight into the way that landmine impact is conceptualised by those working within the sector. I begin by considering the institutional environment in which mine action is situated. I then explore the organisational culture of mine action by documenting the motivations for working in the sector, and some of the tensions within mine action that were raised by the interviewees. The chapter concludes with an examination of the ways that mine action actors conceptualise the effect that landmines have on the lives of local people, and an exploration of the way that local people are characterised.

### **6.1 The Mine Action Environment:**

Mine action is situated within a number of distinct, but overlapping environments each of which exert influence on the way landmine impact is conceptualised by those working in the sector. The diagram below illustrates some of the institutions, organisations and groups found within these environments that shape the sector and influence each other.

Figure 10: Factors influencing mine action



The three broad interlinked environments I identified from observation and interview data are: the institutional architecture, the organisational culture and the local environment. The institutional architecture comprises donors, international conventions, the national environment, development organisations and the media. The organisational culture encompasses the structure of mine action agencies, the people working within them and the different agendas they bring to the table. The local environment includes local authorities, local communities, as well as the physical environment. While the local environment is important, this will be discussed more fully in chapter 7, and I will therefore be concentrating on the institutional and organisational environments within this chapter. Different agendas are found within each of these environments, all of which affect the way that mine action actors conceptualise and respond to landmine impact, which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. It should be noted that no donors or government officials were interviewed during my fieldwork, and any views expressed about donors or the government are those of the mine action actors who took part in the research.

#### **6.1.1 The Institutional Architecture:**

The broad environment surrounding mine action is an important consideration when exploring the conceptualisation of landmine impact. Donors, international conventions, the national environment, development organisations and the media all have a bearing on the way that

mine action is shaped, presented and perceived. On the surface, mine action has a simplistic goal – to remove mines from the ground. However, the way that the landmine issue is conceptualised by those in the broader environment was a cause of concern for those working within the sector. As one organisation manager noted, landmines are a humanitarian issue and the sector should therefore focus on the effect that these weapons have on people, rather than concentrating solely on the mines themselves. In addition, as one technical explosives expert stated:

“There’s one thing I don’t like, is calling it the mine sector. It’s not about mines; it’s about people at the end of the day. So I don’t like the way we talk about mine action, because it makes people who don’t know think that it’s all about mines and it’s not.”  
SM, international technical explosives expert

This points to a tension between the way that mine action is perceived by those external to the immediate environment, which was a source of frustration for the interviewees working on the ground. The emphasis on mines instead of people has implications for the way that those in positions of power and authority understand the rationale behind clearance activities, whereby the mines become the focus of projects rather than the people who are affected by them.

#### **6.1.1.1 International Law and National Government Mine Action Strategy**

The RCG is firmly committed to ridding Cambodia of landmines, has ratified the Ottawa Treaty and was the first country to instigate a 9<sup>th</sup> MDG specifically relating to the landmine issue. This was recognised as a positive step as both the RCG and the national and international operators working in the country were all striving towards the same goal. As one community development specialist stated:

“But I think we’re very lucky here, especially having the 9<sup>th</sup> MDG because that really helps the cause. And the government are very much behind the efforts here and that helps enormously to build a collaborative relationship between the government and the operators, which you don’t often see, so I think that’s very positive as well.” FR, international community development specialist

However, the way that the RCG, through the CMAA has designed and implemented the national mine action strategy was a source of concern. The Ottawa Treaty states that countries



have to be totally mine-free in order to meet their mandate. Countries strive to ensure that they meet their annual targets for mine clearance, as the failure to progress at the agreed pace results in a reduction of funding. This was a source of frustration for both national and international mine action actors working in all areas of the sector, who talked about the dissatisfaction they felt with high-level decision-making that was negatively affecting their work in the field. Although all the interviewees agreed with the general sentiment of ensuring that every country signs up to the Treaty, there was also a consensus, particularly among the organisation and project managers that there needed to be a greater understanding on the part of donors on how landmines impact on the lives of people every day and that clearing mines just for the sake of meeting the Treaty mandate was not the best way forward.

“I’m thinking about just clearing land for the sake of square metres and number of ERW, I think we should stop that and leave that for a later stage when the most highly prioritised areas have been cleared.” DP, international programme manager

“We’re getting governments to commit to the Treaty, but what we’re not doing is saying actually what is the humanitarian priority in this country?... It’s a humanitarian problem. It’s an issue that must be prioritised based on the impact of those landmines on people.” FD, international organisation manager

“The national authority seem stuck on the Ottawa Convention and fix every report to the State Parties - we need to clear 1000 km<sup>2</sup>, so we will clear exactly 1000 km<sup>2</sup>. And that’s wrong, but I’m not the national authority and I’m not the government. No matter how much we raise the issue, the government says we want to move this red polygon<sup>23</sup> to green. Even if this red polygon doesn’t yield the highest socioeconomic benefit.” HP, national organisation manager

This points to a tension between those operationalizing mine clearance at field level, and the national mine action strategy which is shaped by the mandate of the Ottawa Treaty. On one hand, the RCG were commended for their commitment to ridding Cambodia of mines. However, on the other hand there was frustration with the way that the national strategy interprets the Treaty mandate, focusing on meeting acreage targets rather than prioritising clearance based on the socioeconomic benefits to affected populations. This has implications

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<sup>23</sup> The polygon is the area marked for clearance

for the way that clearance is prioritised, and the subsequent impact these decisions have on mine-affected people, as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The competition for funding based on meeting the Treaty mandate was another issue raised in the mine action interviews. One interviewee explained that the competitive tendering process meant that organisations would bid to clear land that was more accessible, rather than areas where there was a greater need for clearance, thereby going against the founding principles of mine action. He stated:

“You know, now we clear land for the rich people. By rich I don’t mean the rich, like the rich people here in Phnom Penh, I mean the well off, the better off people. But we should look after the others first. Well the fact that we go for the polygon and not the socioeconomic benefit, and the fact that we go for clearing land through competition, we would have to find land that can easily be cleared, faster, but not the land that is difficult. The land that is difficult is the land where the poor will stay. But if we go for this, we will not win the bid.” HP national organisation manager

This highlights some of the challenges that mine action organisations face in negotiating the different and often conflicting agendas at international, national and local level. Without doubt, mine action actors have to temper the way they think about and present information about landmines in order to conform to the institutional environment in which they are working. In addition, as all the clearance agencies working in Cambodia are subject to the overarching policy outlined by the RCG, they have no choice but to follow the national strategy if they wish to continue to operate in the country. In this way, the mine action organisations working within Cambodia can be viewed as precariously positioned within the institutional environment, with only limited autonomy, obliged to undertake clearance in the way that international law and national policy dictates.

#### **6.1.1.2 National environment:**

Several interviewees raised the issue of land rights, highlighting the national environment in which mine action takes place. As one international organisation manager stated:

“That’s right and that’s very interesting and this is where the land rights come in sometimes. Usually within the community the land rights are understood so the headman has an area and everyone will know that that’s his and they sort of expect

that to be cleared first. But where land rights are more opaque, that's when you really have to work. And that can be said in Cambodia where you get a lot of IDPs or displaced people, where people have lived there for a while then left and returned after a number of years, and came back later, then who actually owns the land? So the teams need to be very aware of that and also the power dynamics of other stakeholders often in regional government or the military who have their own desires on land and whether they should or can dictate what we do and where we do it. But they are the people in control, so it's not just a question of taking a very pc sort of everyone's equal, this is very much Animal Farm where some are more equal than others. And if you don't play the game in some form then you just get kicked out and **no one** has the clearance." NM, international organisation manager

This quote highlights some of the difficulties mine action organisations face negotiating the prioritisation of clearance activities within the national context. While an awareness of local and regional power hierarchies is considered important, working within the boundaries of the situation is also essential. This suggests that mine action organisations have to be politically agile in their consultations with communities. On one hand they have to ensure that the priorities of local authority figures are met in order to remain in the country. On the other hand, mine action organisations are also trying to meet the needs of the most vulnerable community members.

A second issue raised by the interviewees was the releasing of land post clearance. HE, a national organisation manager spoke about the difficulties of ensuring that cleared land remained in the possession of the intended beneficiaries. As BL, an international community development specialist, explained, sometimes people do not willingly sell the land, they may be pressured into it, or the land may be grabbed by someone else and stated:

"You don't get that same extent of land grabbing, I think, on demined land now as there was in the past, but it still happens to a certain extent and sometimes people get land and they sell it, and sometimes they get more than one plot because they put down different people's family names and things like that. So people can play the game, even if they're poor, they play the games. You know, it's a bit of a minefield really, looking at all the land issues." BL, international mine action actor

The national environment can therefore be viewed as an important influence on the prioritisation and land releasing processes. The interviewees revealed that mine action organisations are precariously positioned within the national environment and have to negotiate their presence with local power structures. In addition, the interview data shows that while mine action organisations want to ensure that cleared land remains with the intended beneficiaries, in reality they have little authority to challenge those who grab land from others or choose to sell plots in order to gain immediate monies. This highlights the importance of issues surrounding land rights and tenure both for mine action organisations, and local people, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

#### **6.1.1.3 Donors**

Mine action organisations rely on donors to supply the necessary funds for mine clearance to continue. By holding the purse strings, donors have an inordinate amount of power to shape how, when and why mine action is undertaken. In the past, as one international OM explained, the sector was exceptional as there was a lot of money earmarked specifically for mine clearance activities based on the needs of the most vulnerable and affected populations. However, funding for stand alone mine clearance is decreasing, and both programme managers and technical explosive experts were frustrated by what they saw as increase in political considerations amongst donors, as shown in the quotes below:

“All the people from the western world sitting up there with all their money working out how to dole it out. It’s a pity that so many of their decisions are made on the politics rather than the needs. That’s what often gets frustrating for the NGOs on the ground because you’re seeing the impact on the ground that the decisions in the big offices have, you know, the Europeans, whatever, it’s all very political.” GW, international programme manager

“So obviously we’re non-profit, non-government and one thing I like to say is that we’re very non-political because I also think, this is my personal opinion, that some of these larger organisations are just a political tool for their prime donor governments. I mean if you’re an organisation and you’re getting 75% of your funding from a donor which is also from the country in which you’re registered it comes across as if you’re carrying out the actions of that government’s strategy as opposed to being independent and non-political.” SM, international technical explosives expert

It can therefore be argued that mine action organisations face a constant battle in order to stake their claim on part of the funding pot, encouraging them to market their wares to make them seem more attractive to the donors by demonstrating not only that they are clearing mines effectively, but also that they provide value for money. As one programme manager noted,

“The mine contamination is diverse and in some ways quite frustrating because you could clear 100 square meters with just one anti-personnel mine. Then you’re trying to figure out the most cost effective way of clearing it, because ultimately we’re all accountable to donors so we need to be giving them value for money and also the people value for money.” TW, international programme manager

This suggests that demonstrating value for money is equated to the number of mines removed from the ground and acreage cleared, implying that donors lack sufficient understanding of the impact of mines on the everyday lives of people and are basing their funding decisions, in part, on more measureable outputs. This was confirmed by one international community development specialist who explained that donors sometimes came on short visits, but unless they had spent any length of time in the field, or indeed, the country, they would not be able to see the changes that had taken place as a result of mine clearance.

The need to demonstrate that mine action effectively improves the lives of local people and therefore warrants continued funding highlights the importance of impact assessments and evidence based evaluations. The way that mine action activities are evaluated was an area of concern for several of the mine action actors I spoke to. As one international community development specialist noted:

“With impact assessment, should it be the individual demining organisations that do that when they don’t really have people there who can collect data, and look at qualitative data and also when a lot of donors want quantitative data? They want to know what is the productivity; they want to know what is the tonnage of the crops grown or whatever. They don’t want to know peoples’ perceptions really, and it’s difficult to collect information about people’s perceptions, and this is the problem.” BL, international community development specialist

Impact assessment is relatively new for mine action, which traditionally has not systematically recorded baseline data that can then be used to demonstrate impact over time. Additionally, as different mine action organisations might undertake clearance in the same area at a different time, centralising baseline data, or even clearance data can prove difficult. Assessing impact is therefore quite problematic within mine action, but not only because of the lack of data:

“Returning to areas that have been cleared, we do a bit of that, but it’s quite resource intensive and costs money so we don’t have the money to do it. It’s interesting because donors always want to know about impact but they don’t want to pay to know about impact. Because it’s outside the project funding frame, time frame.” NM, international organisation manager

“Sometimes, I’ve been to places where land has been cleared. And so you do a post clearance assessment which is done up to 12 months after land has been handed over, so basically it’s to check that the beneficiaries got the land, and to get a general idea of how that land is being used and for what purposes. So it’s a good process, but the big problem is that if they find any problems like that land has been sold, or land is not being used by the beneficiaries, what to do? ... And say that this cleared land has been sold and it shouldn’t have been sold, who is going to do anything about it? And I think that’s a big problem in the whole process.” BL, international community development specialist

These quotes raise two issues. Firstly, that mine action actors do not have the necessary time or resources to undertake these kinds of ex-post evaluations. Secondly, mine action organisations have no power to challenge beneficiaries who sell land which has been cleared for them. This suggests that mine action organisations are in a difficult position, as donors require evaluations that demonstrate the effectiveness of mine action over time, but are unwilling to invest in the development of impact measures or to fund longer-term evaluations.

Another concern raised during the interviews was the ability of evaluations to isolate mine clearance as a variable affecting, either positively or negatively, the lives of local people. As one interviewee explained:

“The impact of physically removing the blockages essentially, that’s what we’re looking at. Are people using the land more? Are they using it for different purposes? Are they using it for what they told us they would use it for? And do they have access to what they need to have access to? I think that what is interesting is how far we can claim impact. So there are outcomes and outputs and then there are impacts. So if we clear a water hole for example, and people have access to fresh water, the immediate outcome is access to fresh water, but the impact might be that they improve infant mortality rates, but can we claim that we have improved infant mortality rates? Just because we cleared the landmines at the water hole? And those kinds of questions are a little bit more difficult.” NM, international organisation manager

While there are clear benefits of clearance, in so much as the danger of landmines have been removed from the ground, attributing all changes to life and livelihood to clearance risks overstating the positive impact of mine clearance, creating unrealistic expectations for future projects. This raises the question of whether it is more realistic at the current time for mine action organisations to consider outcomes rather than impact for the purposes of evaluation, until a more systematic framework has been designed that can be universally applied, which will be discussed in chapter 8.

It can be seen that for those working in the field, demonstrating impact to donors is felt to remain a difficult undertaking. The interviewees implied that donors exert considerable influence on the reporting of mine action effectiveness, and until mine action organisations find a way to adequately capture the many aspects of peoples’ lives that are affected by the presence of mines that are more difficult to quantify, impact assessments and evaluations will only present a partial picture of the benefits that clearance brings.

#### **6.1.1.4 Development Organisations**

Despite the tensions that some interviewees iterated about the nature of the sector, there was consensus that in principle mine action should be linked to development. As one interviewee stated:

“Mine action is just a small part of the development process. It’s the thing that’s restricting development in certain areas of the country and that’s as simple as it is.”  
FD, international organisation manager

In this sense, mine action falls within both the humanitarian and development spheres, and can act as the facilitator for subsequent development activities once land has been made safe. However, how mine action links to development is a contentious issue which mirrors debates within the literature, and is the source of the main disagreement between the two main international mine clearance agencies working in Cambodia and worldwide. Should mine action follow development? Or should development follow mine action? As two programme managers from the main international mine action organisations working in Cambodia stated:

“Agencies have published papers that say mine action should lead development and development shouldn’t lead mine action, but I think the mine action sector needs to be humble enough to recognise that we’re just the start of the process, we’re far from the end of the process, so yeah, I think that [integrating mine action and development] it’s critical and it would be good to see it happen here.” TW, international programme manager

“In some cases that have happened before people are arguing that mine clearance should follow development, whereas we would argue that development should follow mine clearance. The issue as to why it’s not happening, or could be happening more is all down to finances in Cambodia.” GN, international programme manager

These quotes point to a difference in the conceptualisation of what mine action is. On one hand, it is viewed as a standalone activity that should be undertaken before any development activities are considered, set against the opposing view that mine action is part of the development process. In the latter case, priorities are set in tandem with development partners, whereas in the former understanding, the mine action organisations take the lead in deciding where and when to undertake clearance.

The benefits of linking mine action with development were clearly outlined by one international community development specialist, who stated:

“So instead of clearing the land and development happening afterwards, we start at the beginning. We’re looking at what are the activities that will take place, and we build that into our work plan, or we facilitate the development, creating safer access for our partners. And then looking jointly at how we can create projects where we can have better impact through not only clearing the land, but also by ensuring that the



land will be used productively and that the community have the means to do so. They're going to have the materials to build houses, training in livestock, and the seeds to do agriculture. Otherwise I quite strongly believe that it's just not enough - it's not enough just to clear land, because if you don't provide alternative livelihood strategies, people will still conduct high-risk activities. By working with development partners we are able to say at least that this household is less likely to go into dangerous areas. But you can't force people not to take risks, but you can provide alternative strategies. So that's very much why we work with development partners." FR, international community development specialist

This quote reveals that for those working within the field of community development, it is recognised that mine clearance alone is not enough to improve the lives of affected people, a point that will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 8. Instead, combining clearance with development provides people with the tools with which to utilise mine-free land, reducing the risks that people have to take in order to sustain a living. One national deminer I interviewed, who had lived and worked in the village for two years, supported this point and told me that he believed mine clearance and development should always go hand in hand. He stated that once they had cleared mines they then concentrated on developing infrastructure such as roads and ponds in order to improve the quality of the villagers' lives.

It is interesting to note that only those people working closely with communities clearly articulated the reasons for the importance of linking mine clearance with development. This suggests that prolonged exposure to the realities of living with landmines leads to a stronger orientation towards people and development issues rather than seeing mine clearance in predominantly technical terms.

Although every mine action actor I spoke to agreed with the aspiration to link mine action with development, the interviewees also raised a number of concerns. The first related to the failure of development NGOs to take landmines into consideration when planning projects in post-conflict mine-affected areas, highlighting the way that landmines and ERW are often a forgotten aspect of war:

"Where there has been a conflict and wherever there are mines and UXO and other items, if you don't have the clearance it will be an impediment on your other ambitions. And this is still a big area of frustration for me because now some of the

big, well, any NGO, they come up with these master plans to go in and do an amazing development project and they spend a lot of time and money working on it, but they don't think are there any landmines there. Often. And then they turn up and think, oh shit, there's some landmines here, now what are we going to do? So the whole plan is completely stuffed before they get in." NM, international organisation manager

Planning that does not take the specific locality into account speaks of a failure to consider how the presence of landmines may hinder development initiatives. It also reveals that at times there is little co-ordination between organisations working in a specific setting as they are all following their own individual mandates. This highlights a tension between those working on a humanitarian basis, dealing more in terms of solving an immediate problem, rather than as a development activity that seeks to improve the overall lives of people, as suggested by Feardon (2008). One international organisation manager criticised development NGOs who attempt to take on activities that are realistically outside their core competencies in post-conflict settings, such as Mine Risk Education, simply because the project design has incorporated this and the funding has been secured. This was a source of frustration for the same international organisation manager who argued that well-established mine action specialists are usually already working in these areas who have the necessary skills to undertake such work. Ineffective MRE can prove fatal for local people, and development organisations that venture into this sphere without the skills to undertake the work have the capacity to do more harm than good. The implication is that both the mine clearance and the development organisations need to play to their strengths, and work collaboratively to ensure that the needs of mine-affected people are met.

The trust that local people place in mine clearance agencies is enormous, as they are responsible for ensuring that the land is made safe. If mine clearance is not properly carried out, for example by an INGO with less experience in this field, this reduces the trust that local populations will place in any organisation undertaking such work, damaging the reputations that the most well-established mine action organisations have built up over the years. As one international technical explosives expert explained, if a local community does not have faith in the mine action organisation clearing their land, then regardless of however much those mine action actors try and persuade local people that the ground is now safe, they will not walk on it or work on it, thereby nullifying any positive impact that mine clearance might have.

The fact that some mine action organisations are obliged to partner with development organisations in order to secure donor funding, was another concern raised during the interviews. Some interviewees expressed their frustration with these conditions, as in many cases, development agencies do not work in heavily mine contaminated areas because of the obvious dangers, thereby making it difficult to link mine action with development. As one international programme manager noted:

“So, whenever there is a request from a development NGO to assist them, if possible we will help them. If the request is there, we will help them, but they don’t really come along that often, they don’t. Because remember that a lot of our work is associated at that family, sort of village level and a lot of the areas where we’re working in, particularly in the likes of Oddar Meanchey, there aren’t that many development NGOs there.” GN, international programme manager

The scarcity of development organisations working in mine-affected areas was also raised by a national community development specialist who explained that in the past their organisation did not combine clearance with development:

“So our organisation mandate is clearance, supporting development and saving lives. I say, yeah, saving lives ok, but supporting development, where do we support development? Yes, we support NGOs. But when NGOs make a strategy plan, they never set up in mine-contaminated areas, they have no plans there. So, the people cannot use the land after mine clearance, because of what? Because the people living in the mine-contaminated area, they are very poor. Poor property, poor knowledge, poor skills. So they need more support - they need more support technically, by providing training, and support from the community development facility such as infrastructure.” PO, national community development specialist

These quotes demonstrate one of the difficulties of donor conditionality raised by the interviewees, when the funding bodies do not fully understand the reality of working on the ground. If funding is dependent upon partnering with a development organisation, what happens if there are no organisations working in the areas that are most in need of mine clearance? As the interviewees suggested, the danger of such an approach is that communities who have set up home in the most hostile and inhospitable of environments remain vulnerable to the risks of mines because they do not fit into current donor specifications for projects.

The source of funding for joint mine action and development projects was also a matter raised by an international programme manager, who stated:

“There is a limited development funding base in Cambodia, and that is shrinking. There’s only a limited pot there so you can’t put out expansive integrated mine action and development projects because there isn’t the money there. Our budget here has decreased by 35% in the last 4 years, so we wouldn’t go to a donor and say that we want to put mine action money into a development project because that means that we’re going to lose more money for demining.” GN, International programme manager

This reveals a tension between meeting donor mandates to integrate mine action with development, whilst simultaneously being able to secure enough funding for clearance activities themselves. As the pot of funding is shrinking, so the incentive reduces to design integrated mine action and development projects.

The perceived unequal relationship between mine action agencies and development organisations was another source of frustration for several of the interviewees. This raises the issue of power, as there was a sense that mine action agencies are treated as service providers for development organisations. One organisation manager explained that NGOs tend to dictate where they want to undertake projects and then request clearance and other mine action activities in order to be able to implement their projects. One way to overcome this is jointly funded and co-ordinated mine action and development projects, where neither organisation is subordinate to the other. However, joint prioritization, design and implementation, is not a common occurrence as logistically it is difficult to organise, with competing mandates making it hard to undertake. One international community development specialist suggested a more creative way forward that could combine the skills and resources of both mine action and development organisations:

“They could really integrate it more and look at how, you know, look at how development needs can complement the mine action needs. Say ok, you’re living in this community, you have all these mine threats and there’s no way that an agency is going to come in and clear all of these issues, but maybe there are development interventions that can reduce risk. For example if you have to go to a water source that’s mined, then we could request a development agency to come in and build a well

or build a pond, and so help to reduce the risk as well as, but it's really difficult to do because development agencies all have their own plans and mandates and they don't want to be a service provider in the way that mine action agencies are. But if you could actually integrate programmes to work along both those levels, not just mine action providing a service for development, but development also providing a service to reduce risk in high risk areas." BL, international community development specialist

This kind of combined mine action and development planning and implementation is potentially a different way of integrating the two sectors who are being drawn closer and closer together as mine action moves from a standalone emergency activity, to a more long term activity as countries move from direct conflict into peace building. As it stands, the reality of coordinating such programmes is no easy task. Many of the people I interviewed questioned the extent to which it is realistic to combine mine action with development highlighting the issue of organisational boundaries, and where mine action ends and development begins.

While the interviewees clearly demonstrated that there is a willingness to work with development partners, they also highlighted some of the barriers they faced in achieving this. It was implied that NGOs require a greater understanding of the problems that the presence of landmines cause for affected communities. In addition, questions were raised about the ways in which mine action and development agencies could effectively work together. The interview data therefore suggests that the link between mine action and development is a relationship in its infancy.

#### **6.1.1.5 The Media**

While political considerations influence donor strategy, decisions about funding are also made on the basis of the number of accidents, deaths and injuries that have happened. In addition, whether or not a particular mine-affected country has had a high international media profile also affects where funds are awarded. In this way, the media also play a role in shaping how landmine impact is conceptualised. As two interviewees explained:

"Countries like Afghanistan, they obviously have huge problems, but they're sucking out 60% of the pot of funding to help that one country. All the rest of the countries are competing for the rest of the pot. So many people you ask, it's all about body count, and what it really all boils down to, you always get that question, how many people are dying? And if lots of people are dying then you're more likely to get more money.

It's a really awful thing, because the best thing for us funding wise would be if a few people got blown up. Isn't that perverse?" GW, international programme manager

"And obviously as other conflicts come up there's more of a high profile and donor attention, and the media attention swings to the most high-profile case, so I think we often get asked a lot of questions like why is it taking so long, but actually Cambodia is still within the top 4 most contaminated and most high impacted countries on earth and there was as much clearance done here as there was in Afghanistan last year. Afghanistan and Cambodia had the most metres squared cleared. So I think that the level of attention to the main stakeholders and donors and it wasn't as high profile across the globe as it should have been. Yeah, it's very much a forgotten conflict, a forgotten part of the world and people don't often realize and they often say to me, are there still landmines there?" FR, international community development specialist

These are strong statements that reveal the challenges mine action actors face when trying to incorporate other elements of landmine impact. Reporting that mine clearance, for example, eases access to water sources or allows families to visit the pagoda because the road has been cleared of mines seems insignificant when compared to the more headline grabbing reduction in casualties. However, it is often the small things that make a huge difference to people's lives. As the mine action actors see it, the difficult task is to fully understand and adequately explain these more nuanced benefits of mine clearance in a way that resonates with donors, governments, development organisations and the media, thereby ensuring funding for such activities continues.

### **6.1.2 The Organisational Culture:**

Organisational mandates, the professional background of mine action personnel, motivations for working in the sector and different approaches to mine clearance are all factors that influence the way the landmine problem is thought about and tackled. This more immediate environment can therefore be seen as another important consideration when exploring the reasons behind current understandings of the ways that landmines affect local people.

#### **6.1.2.1 Organisational mandates**

While all of the mine action actors I interviewed were committed to improving the lives of affected people by removing mines from the ground, there were differences in the way that the different actors approached the situation. As one organisation manager explained, in the

past, there were enough funds for mine action organisations to work side by side. The situation has now changed, with the shrinking pot of funds changing inter-agency relationships, as mine action organisations find themselves as direct competitors. As two interviewees noted:

“Mine action is all in the same business but unfortunately funding drives competitiveness and it can also become more cut throat at the end of the day. So you get the same actors, the main actors chasing funding from a large group of donors, but the same donors are doing the same thing, so someone’s going to get the money and someone’s not going to get the money at the end of the day.” SM, international technical explosives expert

“I mean, people will stab each other in the back, for a bit more money.” GW, international organisation manager

The competitive tendering process has also resulted in clearance being based on ease of access rather than need. As one national organisation manager noted earlier, land is now cleared for rich people. This has implications for people who have very little materially and often set up home in the most inhospitable of places where no one else wants to live. If mine clearance were prioritised purely on the needs of affected people, the most vulnerable would be at the top of the list. However, this is not always the case. One international community development specialist explained that when clearance was being prioritised, a list of beneficiaries was drawn up. However, if a family was deemed too poor, then for the most part, these families were not prioritised as beneficiaries because it was assumed that the amount of cleared land that would be available to them would not be enough to sustain a living, or that they would not have the skills or resources to farm it effectively. This highlights the political nature of mine action, and the difficulties mine action actors face in balancing meeting the needs of the community while also satisfying organisational mandates and donor requirements.

#### **6.1.2.2 The professional background of mine action personnel**

From the interview data and my observations of the sector at the 11<sup>th</sup> MSP and during fieldwork, it was clear that mine action is no longer the preserve of ex-military personnel. From the interviews I identified three distinct types of people working at field level in the sector: technical explosive specialists, developmentalists and community workers. Each of

these types of people brings their own agenda to the table, and their understandings of the role of mine action is determined by their past experiences, and the focus of their specific roles within the organisation.

The interviews highlighted differences in focus of the different mine action personnel. As one organisation manager noted, he had been trying to keep technical people out of decisions about the prioritisation of clearance activities for many years, as he believed that this should be based on information gathered from local communities. On the other hand, one technical explosives expert voiced his frustrations with the way that local people sometimes lied about where they believed mines were located in order to have their field cleared of vegetation. This has implications for the way that mine action is undertaken, depending on who is in a position of authority within the organisation. This leads on to a consideration of the motivations for working in the mine action as a way of further understanding the organisational culture of the sector.

#### **6.1.2.3 Motivations for working in mine action:**

Exploring personal motivations proved to be an interesting starting point for each of my interviews. I wanted to understand people's reasons for working in the sector in order to gain an insight into the way that they conceptualised mine action. In addition, my aim was to focus discussions around the interviewee's own personal experiences and viewpoints to garner their subjective feelings and understandings. I began by asking each interviewee how they had come to work in mine action and what motivated them to continue, which helped relax the interviewees, as well as narrowing their focus on mine action to a much more personal level. A number of key motivations were revealed from the data that I will discuss in turn: seeing tangible results; mine action as a straightforward sector and the military structure of mine action.

##### **6.1.2.3.1 Tangible Results:**

Invariably, nearly every interviewee spoke about being able to see tangible results, and an immediate difference in peoples' lives once a minefield had been cleared:

"You're actually doing something tangible. You're actually seeing the guy who has the land cleared. You know they say here, those signs, you know, that every landmine cleared is a life saved, that's pushing it. But for everything you are taking out of the



ground, we know that that is tangibly helping people.” CW, international programme manager

“I enjoy that it’s very specialised and it’s very tangible so when you take a mine out of the ground or you destroy an item of UXO then it’s gone and it can no longer harm. I like that it’s so tangible.” FR, international community development specialist

The underlying motivation for working in the sector can clearly be seen to encompass the gratification of seeing immediate results that positively impact on the lives of mine-affected people by providing them with safe land and reducing the risk of death and injury. This highlights, in one sense, the simplistic rationale of mine action: taking landmines out of the ground in order to save lives, a humanitarian activity. However, while there is no doubt that this is rewarding, being able to see the fruits of one’s labours straight away, it belies the complexity of the process and suggests that mine action is still viewed as a stand alone activity that is not fully within either the humanitarian or the development spheres.

#### **6.1.2.3.2 Mine action as a straightforward sector:**

A second motivation for working in mine action related to the relative straightforwardness of the work, which several of the interviewees articulated as a reason for staying in the sector:

“I think its quite proactive in terms of you know, grabbing the problem as it’s defined and doing it like immediately, without the need for endless procrastination of what the problem is before you deal with it.” TW, international programme manager

“I love the work. I mean the thing about mine action is that you see achievements every day. You know, if you’re doing something in medical development or something, you have to come back in 2 or 3 years time to see the changes. But with mine fields, you go and see a mine field and you come back in a month’s time and you see how much that has progressed and then when you’ve finished, you come back and you see people using the land. It’s tangible, you see it there and then, and that’s great.” GN, international programme manager

Identifying the problem, on the surface, therefore appears to be relatively easy – landmines negatively affect people’s lives by their presence – and the solution is therefore to remove the landmines in order to improve the wellbeing of the local people. However, this over-

simplification of the issue is interesting in itself, as it suggests that mine action alone remedies the problem without the need for further intervention. This goes some way to explaining why there is a certain tension between linking mine action with development activities, as it is clear that some interviewees found certain aspects of development work problematic, and indeed frustrating, particularly in terms of the time it takes to define and then respond to the issue that needs addressing.

#### **6.1.2.3.3 Military structure of the sector:**

A number of mine action actors, some ex-military and others from non-military backgrounds, also mentioned the structure of the sector and having formulaic rules and regulations as a positive attribute:

“I think that it’s a very honest sector and also in terms of professionalism in terms of things like fixed-price contracting and also, dare I say it, a certain military flavour to it. Systems are of paramount importance, structure is of paramount importance and I think that that comes across in the way that we work.” TW, international programme manager

“Personally I’m an ex-military person, but I’m also a service orientated person. With the culture in mine action, it is almost like military. People you meet in the field especially, not so much in the headquarters, are very much in that line. And that fits me so well. I feel at home.” HP, national organisation manager

Although each individual has their own personal motivation for working in the mine action sector, it was clear that everyone I interviewed was committed to attempting to improve the lives of affected people by removing mines from the ground, making the land safe and reducing the risk of death and injury. However, there was an innate contradiction between the means and the ends. On the one hand there was an emphasis on seeing the tangible results of removing mines from the ground in terms of people being able to access land and live safely, a more human focus. This was juxtaposed on the other hand with the military-like institutional culture that relies heavily on procedures and structure, a more technical focus on landmines. This points to a sector in transition, one that has traditionally worked on its own within the humanitarian arena, but which is now increasingly being called upon to join the broader development sphere. The emphasis on linking mine action with development is making the sector reconsider the way in which it operates, and to think about the broader developmental impact of landmines on affected people.

#### 6.1.2.4 Competing agendas

Although mine action is now attracting personnel from other sectors such as international and community development, there is still a skew towards employing ex-military technical personnel within mine action organisations for their explosives expertise. As one organisation manager explained, many technical experts are in positions of authority, and understandably focus on the clearance side of operations, feeding donors with information from this particular perspective. This goes some way to explaining the preference to focus on outputs and outcomes, and to conceptualise landmine impact in quantifiable terms. However, as mine action continues to change, and is pushed towards greater integration with both the humanitarian and development spheres, there is a growing backlash against the technical perspective of landmine impact. As one organisation manager noted:

“Now technical people aren’t the best people to understand where needs to be cleared. Who are the best people? The communities. So how do you find that information? You liaise with the community in order to understand their issues and their problems. My struggle [in the sector] has always been keeping the technical out of too much of the decision-making process. And I imagine it’s going to still be a struggle and it’ll be interesting to see how it develops in the future.” FD, international organisation manager

In order to explore the different agendas found within mine action organisations, I asked each interviewee how they measured the success of their work. Some interviewees found it difficult to interpret this question and the variety of responses allowed me to ascertain organisational differences between the two main international agencies working in Cambodia, in the monitoring and evaluation of projects. By far the most abundant conceptualisation of success was meeting the pre-defined objectives of the project as outlined by both the donor and the mine action organisation:

“Success is obviously project specific in terms of what donor objectives we’ve set and then reached. Obviously square metres cleared is important, the amount of mines out of the ground is important, and then obviously because we try and keep synergies with development partners for post-clearance land use, you know, we’re looking at the kind of impact after the clearance has taken place. You know, how much of it is being used for agriculture, how much of it is used for infrastructure, roads, schools, houses, whatever.” TW, international programme manager

“So if we were looking at reporting and measuring success, we will be measuring them against the targets we set up to achieve. So that in itself gives us an indication of success, the number of metres squared, the number of beneficiaries we’ve reached, what the land is going to be used for.” FR, international community development specialist

This type of assessment speaks of a top-down approach to mine action, whereby donors define objectives, mine action organisations implement them, and success is measured in terms of quantifiable indicators. Less credence is given to more qualitative indicators of success, including how the local people feel about the clearance, and the difference it has made to their lives, although some mine action organisations do use case studies in addition to statistics, but this is very much viewed as an add-on, rather than a necessity. In contrast, one PM explained that they did not measure success per se, but instead focused on the job at hand, getting the mines out of the ground, implying that it was unnecessary to consider projects in terms of failure or success if they were efficiently and effectively undertaking their work. He said:

“We don’t stand back at the end of the year and then analyse the number of mines found, area cleared etc, there is no, there isn’t a bench mark for saying that this project is a success or a failure. All we’re looking at is trying to get all of our assets to try and clear as much as possible on any given day.” GN, international programme manager

Both types of responses were interesting and demonstrated a marked contrast in style between the different organisations. On one hand, it could be argued that measuring success by meeting donor objectives is a more politically savvy way of ensuring continued funding, whereas concentrating on ensuring that the most amount of land and mines is cleared in the most productive way is playing more into the hands of the national government by assisting them in meeting the Treaty mandate. The missing element in both perspectives was local voices, which, I would argue, are fundamental in evaluating outputs, outcomes or indeed, impact. This was recognised by two national mine action actors who stated:

“I think that you could only measure success when the community is developed, the mined area that you cleared has been cultivated and put into productive use. If you

cleared the land and the land is still vacant, that is a failure. But if the land is put to productive use, whether high yield or low yield, that is some success, and of course, a better happy community. When some people are rich, and most people are poor in the community, then that's not successful. So everybody has to have some fair share of, how do you say, of wealth, that they would live a healthy life, they would have sufficient crops to feed the family and then savings sufficient to look after the generations. I think that that is success." HE national organisation manager

"Success could be seen in two parts. Firstly, success is achieving the quota of our plan. For example, from January to December we finished 5 km of road, 2 ponds, and we have dug 3 culverts. But also when people don't move, and the people's living conditions are better if we compare it to before, I would say that that is success." PO, national community development specialist

These quotes show some of the differences in thinking about evaluation between the international and national mine action actors I interviewed. The international interviewees focused predominantly on measuring success against pre-defined objectives such as the amount of land cleared, number of mines removed and beneficiaries reached. The national mine action actors also emphasized the importance of achieving targets, but in addition, highlighted the material and social benefits that the local people gained from mine clearance.

Another international organisation manager who had worked within mine action from its inception in the early 1990s also spoke about the importance of local voices in the design and evaluation of projects, which countered the current management view expressed by the international mine action actors. He stated:

"You get people who are great at doing forms for outputs and quite often, you know it doesn't really relate to the whole issue. Then it becomes a matter of filling in the boxes, and the more boxes you put, the more people will fill them in. And donor organisations and INGOs are full of them. And that's what they do, and the poor old person in the field who struggles to be a Community Liaison person, trying to push the agenda against the technical, and the technical saying well actually we've got a target to get to, and the head office wants this. And head office will say that the donor wants this, and the fundraiser is almost dominating the landscape because his job is to go and find donor money, and we can get this donor if we do it this way. So you've got

everyone competing for their own area whereas everything should go back to the Community Liaison being the focus of the organizations, and therefore the people who are running the organisations are the communities themselves.” FD, International organisation manager

This reveals a frustration with the current formula for reporting on the effectiveness of mine action that has become lost in bureaucratic translation. It also demonstrates that the environment(s) in which the sector is situated has limited the capacity of organisations to consider the full extent of the ways that landmines affect the lives and wellbeing of local people.

Having considered the institutional and organisational environments in which mine action is situated, and the ways that it shapes the attitudes and behaviour of mine action actors, it is now time to explore how landmine impact is conceptualised by those working in the sector.

## **6.2 Conceptualisations of landmine impact:**

When the mine action actors spoke about their understandings of the impact of landmines on wellbeing, all of the interviewees emphasised two main ideas again and again. The first related to the impact of landmine accidents on individuals and families and the second was how living with the continual presence of landmines affected peoples’ everyday lives.

“Yeah, I think that there are two impacts that are fairly big areas – one is death and injury, that side of things, and the other is that landmines are effectively an area of denial weapon so it stops people from using the land. That’s the other big area.”  
NM, international organisation manager

“The impact of landmines means the people cannot access health centres, cannot access water sources, cannot access proper education, and one thing, that affects the wellbeing of people is when the people get injured.” PO, national community development specialist

I begin with a discussion of the impact of landmine accidents on individuals and their families, which is then followed by an exploration of the ways that mine action actors conceptualise the effect of living with the continual presence of mines.

### 6.2.1 Impact of landmine accidents:

Landmines are designed to maim and kill and leave a devastating legacy on civilian life long after direct conflict has ceased. Individuals who are injured by landmines require assistance, not only from medical professionals in the form of treatment, both emergency and longer-term rehabilitation, but also in terms of support from their families. The interviews with mine action actors revealed that they viewed the impact of landmine accidents on individuals and their families firstly in terms of loss of income and economic capital. As two interviewees noted:

“The emergency, stopping death and injury, is not only an immediate short term impact, because if people are injured and you know very well the long term medical care that those individuals bear is a massive burden. So in Cambodia there are apparently 30,000 traumatic amputees, mostly from landmines, but also from things like car accidents and the like, but the 30,000 people who’ve been injured are going to be a significant drain on the health resources on a country like Cambodia. It would be here if we had a lot of veterans – they’d need support.” NM, international organisation manager

“And one thing that affects the wellbeing of people is when the people get injured. The people in the whole family have to earn the money to provide medicine, to buy medicine for the victim. So when they have any property, such as cattle, land, gold they have to sell it to get it, to buy medicine.” PO, national community development specialist

These quotes show that the impact of landmine accidents are understood in terms of cost, which are invariably born by the family, not only in terms of paying for medical care, but also having to find alternative livelihood activities to substitute the loss of income resulting from an injured person no longer being able to work. The physical injuries sustained by landmine accidents was also mentioned by two national technical explosives experts, who stated:

“There are many types of mines, AT mines and AP mines. If a person is involved in an explosion and they get injured, it depends on the type of mine as to the severity of the injury. If it is a small mine then they may lose a foot. If it is a bigger mine then they may lose their whole leg. So it is very difficult. So when they are involved in an

explosion it is very difficult to take them to hospital as it is too far. Most of them die before they even reach hospital.” DM, national technical explosives expert

“Landmines affect men and women the same. But if a woman has a mine accident, it is a little bit more difficult, very very difficult, much more difficult than for a man. The man can do that and do this. If it happens to a woman, it is miserable. If she is pregnant and uses a prosthetic, she cannot go to the farmland. It is difficult for women, if we are talking about mines.” PL, national technical explosives expert

This points to a recognition that while physical impact may be the same for men and women, the social context influences the differential outcomes of landmine accidents on individuals. A national organisation manager further emphasised this point and stated that women injured by landmines are socially stigmatised. He spoke about one young woman who had been injured by a mine as a child, who had told him that when she was growing up no one would play with her and she was jeered at by the other children in her village, leaving her socially isolated. In addition, another national community development specialist explained that women injured by mine accidents were seen as unattractive and were often left by their husbands because of their injuries, leaving them socially vulnerable. This highlights a difference in the gendered impact of landmine accidents, and reveals some of the types of stigmatisation faced by people with disabilities in Cambodia.

Another impact mentioned by some interviewees, particularly those working directly with affected communities was the emotional and psychological effects of being involved in a landmine accident. One national community development specialist stated that those involved in landmine accidents often suffered from depression, which could also lead to alcohol and drug abuse, and a break down in family relationships. Another interviewee who worked in the victim assistance pillar highlighted the emotional and social impact of landmine accidents on the families of those involved, emphasising some of the social hardships that people have to deal with following a landmine accident:

“And secondly, of course, the direct impact of an accident where people usually get permanently injured or temporarily injured, or in case of fatalities the impact, the emotional impact on the family, often they lose a caregiver, a leader, someone who provides perhaps income to the families. Due to an accident the family can be isolated in the community. So that it very clear.” DP, international programme manager



From the interviews, it can be concluded that the impact of landmine accidents are viewed firstly in financial terms – the cost of medical treatment, the loss of income, and the reduction in earnings. In addition, secondary impacts raised by the interviewees related to the physical, emotional, psychological and social effects that landmine accidents have on individuals and their families. Having briefly explored the first impact of landmines from the perspective of mine action actors, it is now time to turn to the second impact: the way that the presence of mines affects the everyday lives of people.

#### **6.2.2 Living with landmines:**

“Mines are just part and parcel of life in Cambodia.” TW, international programme manager

“Our people have to live with this. In Battambang, people say that this is part of their lives so they don’t see the problem until their standard of living has improved.” HP national organisation manager

While it is true that thousands of people in Cambodia continue to live with the presence of landmines on a daily basis, the impact that these weapons have on affected people is less well understood. In one way, this is due to the lack of empirical evidence and research relating to how mines impact on the everyday lives of affected people. In addition, while all the PMs I interviewed had visited mine-affected communities, they had not spent a prolonged period of time in the field, making it difficult for them to fully understand how living with landmines affects people on a daily basis. The emphasis was on landmines as deniers of access to land and services such as education, health care and at a more basic level, water and food.

Interestingly, one community development specialist framed her understandings of landmine impact around the loss of freedom that mine-affected people experience. She stated:

“Absolutely it affects their wellbeing. The communities that we’re working with, the landmines and UXO, although they’ve lived with the issue for decades now they are obstacles to their basic human rights. From access to water, to accessing land, health services, roads, other communities and also it just impedes their socioeconomic development as well. The access to land, the access to being able to use it for their

livelihood. Using the land for agriculture, 80-90% here depend on agriculture as a form of livelihoods. You know, the psychological effects if there are accidents within the community and within the family and just the fact that they're not able to access the same opportunities that other parts of Cambodia or the world, and it's because of landmines that they're not able to do that. So I do definitely think that it has a great impediment on peoples' wellbeing." FR, international community development specialist

By comparing those people who are affected by mines with those who are not, here this interviewee is clearly demonstrating the limiting effect that the presence of landmines has on lives and livelihoods. Mine-affected people are unable to access the same opportunities as other people in the country, and due to their reliance on the land as their main source of income, this negatively impacts on their wellbeing. Without safe land, socioeconomic development is difficult, and local mine-affected people are unable to access even their basic human rights. This presents a hitherto unseen conceptualisation of mine impact in terms of a rights-based approach within this data set, a more in-depth analysis that considers not just the material needs of affected people, but their right to freedom, justice and peace. The presence of mines inhibits their freedom to live the lives of their choosing, hinders their opportunities to develop thereby putting them at a disadvantage to other people in the country and means that they are constantly under threat of violence if they work suspected hazardous land.

The way that the presence of mines affects the quality of peoples' lives was also mentioned by one international organisation manager who stated:

"So basically it's about people's quality of life and part of your quality of life is not to have to be afraid of you children's safety. Not to have to go to bed worrying at night that you cant access any land or you're having to access land, because people don't just starve themselves to death. If you need wood for a fire they go and get it, they're willing to take the risk, so I think its all down to what anyone would expect in life, to live safely and have the minimum quality of life that you can, with abilities and expertise that you've got." FD, International organisation manager

Several interviewees also spoke about the stress that living with landmines has on affected peoples, and the detrimental effect that this has on their quality of life, although this understanding was framed by their own experiences of life:

“So, and I think it’s one in 180 people or something have stood on a landmine here in Cambodia. And it was just, well I suppose it’s a bit like living next to a busy road with your kids with no barrier, you know. But it’s still incredibly worrying for them. There’s no way to quantify it, living amongst that constant danger.” OS, international organisation manager

“You know, when you see, certainly in Cambodia, and I’m sure in other countries as well, where you go to areas that either are or are not being used as agricultural land or for development and you see someone who’s put their house in the middle of a minefield. For their families, for children playing, for trying to go out and get simple things like firewood or cultivate crops, there’s always going to be, the stress level is obviously quite high because they **know** in a lot of cases, not all cases, I’m sure living in contaminated areas has got to be quite stressful on you mentally and psychologically.” SM, international technical explosives expert

The national mine action actors I interviewed had a slightly different view of the ways that the continual presence of landmines affect local people. One national deminer highlighted the importance of mine-free land for Khmer people, and stated that, “They have no land, so they have no job”. A demining platoon leader expanded on this statement and explained that the presence of landmines stops people farming by denying them access to land, reducing their ability to grow crops and therefore sustain a living. He stated that mines also hinder peoples’ ability to undertake other livelihood activities such as gathering firewood or foraging for vegetables. In addition, one national deminer spoke about the psychological impact of landmines, and the fear that people lived with on a daily basis. This, he explained effectively stopped people working the land because they were afraid that they would be injured or killed.

The mine action understanding of the impact of living with the presence of mines can therefore be summarised as firstly materially focused with landmines viewed as deniers of access to land and basic services and inhibitors to socioeconomic development. This represents a pragmatic response to the situation of mine-affected people that is framed by the values and norms of the organisational culture of mine action. Secondary to this conceptualisation was the emotional and psychological impact that landmines have on local people, and the stress and worry they experience on a daily basis. Less mention was made of

the fear that people experienced when living in contaminated areas and the ways that this affected them psychologically as well as materially by stopping them accessing land and livelihood activities.

### **6.3 Conceptualisations of mine-affected people:**

There were variations in the way that local people were conceptualised by the different mine action actors I interviewed working within the sector. The international programme managers focused on local people as beneficiaries and/or victims, while both the international and national community development specialists placed more emphasis on local people as experts of their own situation. In contrast the international technical explosives experts revealed a different perspective, characterising local people as passive, incapable, and sometimes untruthful. The national technical explosives experts countered this conceptualisation and highlighted the importance of local people in the process of identifying contaminated areas and providing knowledge of the local situation. In order to illustrate these differences in characterisation, I will be using the example of village deminers, a highly contentious issue within the mine action sector.

The extent of the landmine problem in Cambodia, which still remains one of the most mine-affected countries in the world despite over 15 years of clearance means that mine action organisations are unable to meet the needs of all affected people simultaneously, and in order to survive and make a living, village deminers therefore undertook clearance activities in order to enhance the lives and wellbeing of themselves and their families. Many former Khmer soldiers have knowledge of mines from their time in the army which they have used to identify, collect and detonate mines in order to make their communities safer. One international CDS spoke about village deminers and the results of some research that had been undertaken to explore villager's motivations behind these activities:

“We’d been asked to look at the problem of village demining, and basically what I was coming back with was, well it’s not a problem because basically people are using their capacities to deal with the situation that they have and no one else is actually meeting that need to the extent that they need - the demining organisations aren’t. So, it is controversial and it was to do also with the fact that a lot of the demining organisations are filled with former military people who don’t really talk to the communities and really find out. It’s much more that they tell them what they need, how they need it.” BL, international community development specialist

The findings from this research were derided and badly received by a number of international mine action actors, particularly technical explosives experts, which points to a degree of frustration that amateurs were taking on the role of professionals. Village deminers were viewed as dangerous individuals who undertook risky clearance activities without having had proper training, thereby endangering their own lives and potentially those of other family members or friends. However, as the village deminers were demonstrating that they were able to safely clear their own land of mines in order to be able to improve their lives, this clearly challenged the conceptualisation of local people as passive victims waiting for assistance. Instead, the village deminers were active agents in their own lives, undertaking a dangerous activity as they did not want, or could not afford, to wait for external assistance.

In contrast to the international technical explosives experts, the community development professionals I interviewed highlighted the importance of villagers demining the land themselves in terms of promoting self-worth and garnering some of the independence that had been lost during the KR period. One national community development specialist stated that his motivation for moving into the sector was precisely because he had read about village deminers and wanted to assist people who were trying to improve their own quality of life:

“The people can demine and clear the mines, many many AP mines and many many AT mines, more than CMAC do, more than the professional deminers do. So they have no equipment at all, they just use the local equipment, spade, knife, they have no metal detector. And they do a very good job: no accidents. So that is why I was interested and I applied myself to work for mine action in the year 2001.” PO, national community development specialist

This presents a different view of local people, which in part can be explained by this particular mine action actor being Cambodian, but also because his area of work was community development. The interviews also revealed that the national mine action actors had a much greater appreciation of local peoples’ abilities to develop ways to cope with the presence of mines. The importance of local knowledge in identifying contaminated areas was also recognised by the national technical explosives experts, as two interviewees explained:

“Sometimes the villagers show us, over there, there was an explosion of an ox cart or a machine for harvesting. Sometimes we get information from the villagers because they

are the landholders and they come and report that there are landmines over there. So we get information from them. We select the people who have lived in the village for at least 3 years to give us the information. They know where the landmines are, but the newcomers don't know where the mines are." PL, national technical explosives expert

"The surveyors have to search for information to get evidence of mines and ask the people who have lived here for a long time, or the ex-soldiers. We ask the landholders and if they say there are no mines, then we ask the VC and if he says there are no mines, then we have to release that land. Some ex-soldiers who were here when they were soldiers, and have lived here for a long time know, because they laid the mines, so they know where they have laid them and where they did not lay them, so we can then release the land. This helps our plan to work faster." DL, national technical explosives expert

Most of the national mine action actors I interviewed were either based in the field working as deminers, or frequently spent time visiting mine-affected villagers. This demonstrates that those people who have spent more time in the field with mine-affected people have a much greater understanding of local capabilities, and are more willing to accept that peoples' experiences and knowledge have value and should not be ignored when undertaking mine clearance.

Although some of the mine action actors spoke about liaising with communities in order to be able to prioritise areas for clearance and find out their needs, not everyone saw the value of this process. One international technical explosives expert stated that local people were often untruthful and lied about where the landmines were in order to have their land cleared of vegetation, and was mistrustful of any information gathered from local people. While the project managers and community development specialists were more positive about liaising with communities, one international community development specialist stated that this was an extractive process that did not promote community capacity or ownership. Instead community liaison was viewed as a tool to gather information that was then taken away, thereby ticking the participation box, without fully engaging the local people in the decision-making process. In addition, one international organisation manager stated that CL had been introduced in order to place local people and communities at the heart of clearance prioritisation. However, he went on to state that although CL was still undertaken, the

community development specialists gathering this information were often bypassed in favour of technical expertise of international technical explosives experts. He viewed this as an unwelcome change and expressed his frustration with expatriate technical staff being put in charge of projects that should be driven instead, by the needs of local people. This shows that although local voices are being heard, they are not necessarily being heeded, a point raised by Bottomley (2003).

It can be seen that local people are conceptualised in a variety of ways by the mine action actors I interviewed. In some cases they are viewed as victims, of circumstance, of landmine accidents. Alternatively, most international programme managers viewed local people as beneficiaries, those waiting to be helped by external persons. The international technical explosives experts conceptualised local people as incapable and sometimes untruthful. This devalues the knowledge, experience and understandings local people have of their own situation, demoting them to bit-part players in the unfolding theatre of post-war activities. In contrast, the international and national community development specialists and the national technical explosives experts characterised local people as capable and knowledgeable, valuing the input that they could have in more effectively prioritising clearance.

#### **6.4 Concluding Thoughts:**

This chapter has presented the findings from interviews conducted with a variety of mine action actors in order to explore how landmine impact is conceptualised. For the majority of interviewees, landmines were viewed as deniers of access to vital resources and inhibitors to development, understood predominantly in material terms, with emotional and psychological impacts being mentioned as secondary effects. By exploring the environments in which mine action takes place, I have provided an analysis of the institutional architecture and organisational culture within which such understandings arise. While it was clear that all of the interviewees were committed to improving the lives of mine affected people, I contend that there is a gap in current thinking surrounding landmine impact where the voices of local people should reside. This I hope to remedy by presenting my findings from time spent living with a mine-affected community in the following chapter.

## **6.5 Postscript to chapter six: DfID mine action evaluations**

This section acts as a postscript to the chapter by presenting a brief summary of two large scale mine action evaluations commissioned by DfID in 2012 and 2013, which I read during the final weeks of writing up this thesis. The evaluations have particular relevance for my research and both situate and substantiate my findings. As such I will briefly précis both evaluations and relate them directly to the findings from this chapter, which will then be further discussed in Chapter 8.

### **6.5.1 Meta evaluation of mine action and development 2012:**

In 2012, DfID commissioned an evaluation to explore understandings of mine action and development in order to inform strategy for funding future projects. The evaluation, undertaken by IOD PARC, involved a review of evaluation documents, analysis of donor strategies, a literature review and interviews with key informants drawn from practitioners working within the sector. The data was then synthesised and the content analysed by considering questions surrounding nine main topics: mine clearance prioritisation; land use; involvement of communities; partnerships; development activities; lessons learned; building capacity for local ownership and value for money (IOD PARC 2012). These topics were then rationalised and the evaluation presents several key findings grouped around the areas of mine action and development; capacity development; monitoring and evaluation and value for money. While capacity development and value for money are important, I will concentrate on the other two themes as they relate more specifically to my findings.

The first finding of the 2012 evaluation was that there are multiple stakeholders working in complex situations within the mine action sector. They list donors, national and local governments, UN agencies, private companies, NGOs and local communities. To this list I would also add the media, the armed forces, and international law (in the form of the Ottawa Treaty). My data supports this assertion, and in addition, I contend that the multiple stakeholders create a complex environment, which shapes conceptualisations and responses to mine contamination and impact.

Secondly, the evaluation found that mine action does not have well-developed links with development organisations. This is supported by my interview data which reveals that mine action while positioned within humanitarianism is also viewed as part of the development process, although there is some confusion about the extent to which mine action should be involved in development activities.



Thirdly, the evaluation emphasised that there are “multiple funding streams” (2012:x). While several interviewees mentioned funding, the focus was more on the effect of competitive tendering and the difficulties in trying to secure enough funding in order to undertake mine action projects.

Fourthly, the meta evaluation highlighted that the monitoring and evaluation process within mine action is under-developed. The evaluation states, “M&E still appears to be largely output and activity-based: e.g. number of mines cleared, physical area cleared, as opposed to possible improved health outcomes, improved education outcomes etc..” (2012:x). My findings reflect this, although the interviews also highlighted the constraints mine action organizations face when donors require ex-post evaluations, but do not allocate the funds to support these activities.

Fifthly, the evaluation states, “Prioritisation at local and national level is critical” (2012:x). Prioritisation was one of the key areas discussed by a number of the interviewees. There was a marked tension not only between local and national level prioritisation, but also between international and national policies. The latter related particularly to the implementation of the Ottawa Treaty mandate, which the interviewees argued focused on meeting landmine clearance and acreage targets, rather than prioritising clearance based on the socioeconomic needs of affected populations.

### **6.5.2 Mine action evaluation 2013**

The second evaluation commissioned by DfID in 2013 draws on the meta evaluation of 2012, but in addition, includes data from visits to four mine-affected countries where DfID support mine action projects: Cambodia, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and South Sudan. Data was collected using a combination of desk research, literature reviews, community impact surveys and key informant interviews, and was analysed by considering the impact of DfID funded programmes in a number of thematic areas. These areas are: “deriving socio-economic benefits to communities from mine action, strengthening the link between mine action and the development process, promoting national ownership and capacity for mine action, delivering VFM, and consolidating programme management.” (WYG, 2013: viii). The evaluation concluded that the mine action programmes funded by DfID have created safer environments for affected peoples and that “Lives and livelihoods have been preserved by clearance operations in every country that the programme has supported.” (2013:34). However, there

were a number of areas of concern raised within the evaluation, relating specifically to the socioeconomic benefits of clearance, linking mine action with development, value for money and M&E and the issue of land rights.

The 2013 evaluation concluded that the prioritisation process does not always allow for due consideration to be given to the benefits that the poorest members of a community would receive from mine clearance. My interview data supports this assertion, and several interviewees identified that very poor people were sometimes left out of the prioritisation process as it was too difficult to justify clearing land for them that may not have then been used productively.

Mirroring the 2012 report, the 2013 evaluation also concluded that linkages between mine action and development are not well developed. My findings support this statement, as the interviews revealed that although there was a willingness to link mine action with development, on a practical level, this was not easy to achieve.

In terms of value for money, the 2013 evaluation found that, “Definition of VFM appears to be particularly problematic for the MA operators and implementing agencies that rely on simple indicators such as cost per hectare of cleared land, average cost of landmine removal, etc.” (2013:29). Again this was supported by the data from the interviews I conducted which showed that there were numerous understandings of what constituted success when evaluating mine action projects. This suggests a need to collate these different understandings in order to fully capture the effectiveness of mine action as viewed from the different perspectives found within the sector.

Finally, the 2013 evaluation raised the issues of land and land rights and argues that mine action organisations are not neutral when it comes to releasing mine-free land. Several of the interviewees spoke about land, particularly in relation to inaccessible areas where the poorest and most marginalised people live and the lack of authority that mine action agencies have if people sell or use cleared land for different purposes than those intended. The importance of land and issues surrounding rights and tenure will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

## **Chapter Seven: Living in a Contaminated Landscape: Villager Perspective**

While studies exist that explore the macro and meso level impact of remnants of war on affected populations, village-level research is scarce (Roberts and Littlejohn 2005). As Harpviken and Millard (2000) assert, in order to gain a deeper understanding of landmine impact, and to make sure that mine action activities are more effective, there is a need for community level studies that document the situation faced by the local people living in these settings. This chapter aims to address this gap in the literature by presenting a local perspective of the ways that landmines affect peoples' lives and wellbeing by drawing on interview data and observation during my time spent living in a mine-affected village in rural Cambodia.

While landmines are conceptualised predominantly as a humanitarian issue, that hinders social and economic development (McGrath 2000), less consideration has been given to the impact that mines have on the environment (Berhe 2007). Even scarcer is research that considers the intertwined and dynamic relationship that people have with the environment, and how this is changed as a result of mine contamination. I argue that as the lives and wellbeing of people are interwoven with the environment in which they are situated, it is critical to consider the social and natural worlds in conjunction when exploring the effects of landmines. This perspective highlights the necessity of recognising how, as well as where people experience mine impact, thereby emphasising the centrality of place in people's lives. More specifically in this chapter, I consider place through the metaphor of a contaminated landscape, and explore how people's lives and wellbeing are affected when living in such an inhospitable environment.

I begin by presenting the village environment as a contextual backdrop for ensuing discussions. From there, the chapter is divided into three parts, and utilises wellbeing ecology as a way of structuring and analysing the data. This approach emphasises the intertwined and dynamic relationship that people have with and in their environments and is systemic, place-sensitive and time-specific. The first section explores what wellbeing is for the villagers, thereby presenting the ideal that they are striving to achieve. Central to the villager's conceptualisation of wellbeing is their relationships with and in their environments, with land acting as the starting point for having what they need for life to be good. The second part of the chapter considers how the villager's wellbeing is affected when living in a contaminated landscape, by exploring their understandings of landmine impact. These are divided into two main impacts: landmine accidents and living with the continual presence of mines. I begin with a discussion

of the impact of landmine accidents, including economic and psychosocial elements, as well as an exploration of the stigmatization that many people who have suffered injuries as a result of landmine explosions face from the wider community. Following this will be a discussion of the ways that the villagers recounted their experiences of living in a heavily mine contaminated place before any mine clearance had taken place. This reveals that living in fear and struggling to survive negatively affect their relations with others and with the environment, whereby nature becomes a dangerous and threatening presence, rather than a nurturing provider. The final section of the chapter considers wellbeing in a partially contaminated landscape, once mine clearance had begun. My data reveals that paradoxically, although mine action is designed to improve the lives and wellbeing of local people, in reality, once mines are cleared from the ground, the villagers are faced with a new and different set of vulnerabilities. Mine-free land is a valued and much sought after commodity, leaving the villagers susceptible to disputes over land boundaries, land grabs and foreclosure from microfinance organisations.

#### **The village environment:**

Before 1997 no one lived in the area that was later to become the village. Instead it was a densely forested region (both bamboo and trees) that was the thoroughfare for both Khmer Rouge and Government forces, and as such was heavily mined with both AP and AT mines. Dirt tracks ran through the forest, and the villagers reported that many battles had been fought in the area resulting in numerous deaths. So why did people come to such an inhospitable place, that was difficult to get to, had no water source and was contaminated with mines? Every villager I spoke to explained that they had come seeking one thing, and one thing only, a plot of land that they could cultivate in order to sustain a living. This allows an insight into the importance of land for the villager's wellbeing and how their quality of life is inherently linked with the surrounding environment.

In the late 1990s, when the first people arrived in the area, they were only just beginning to recover from the decimation that nearly 30 years of civil war had had on the country. People were damaged and traumatised: they had been forcibly relocated from towns to the countryside by the KR, had endured forced labour, seen their fellow countrymen and women turn against each other, watched the destruction of all social systems including education, health care and religion and had to cope with the deaths of friends and family, enduring unimaginable hardship just to survive. Some of the villagers had fled to the refugee camps on the Thai-Khmer border where they lived for many years, while others had been either Government or KR soldiers who had been deployed and fought in the region and decided to

come back as they knew that there was land available. Others had decided to travel the length of the country to seek land and livelihood because they were either landless or did not have enough land to support their families in the places where they had previously lived. Still others had been robbed or had had their land grabbed by other people and a few had come to live in the forest as they had gone bankrupt or had been involved in illegal activities. Making the decision to come to a new unknown area is not an easy one, and demonstrates the desperation that many people felt simply because they wanted to be able to feed their families and be self-sufficient.

The villagers had come from nearly every province in Cambodia generally hearing about the availability of land through word of mouth. Many villagers told me about their reasons for coming to the village and the extremely harsh conditions they were faced with once they arrived. They spoke about the difficult transition they went through before they were able to develop a sense of belonging in the village. For a number of people the challenges of living in such a hostile environment were too much, and after a short time, they left the village never to return. Many, if not most people had never lived in the forest before, so moving to a heavily mine contaminated area that was full of wildlife including wild boar, snakes, and tigers where there was no water, no road, no health care, no shops, no school, no pagoda and no sense of community, was a huge step. As HM explained, only people who came from far away stayed in the village, as they had no money to return to their hometowns, and no land even if they could afford to go back. As such, the newly established village represented both a place of opportunity (to make a living and to put down roots) and a place of danger, as it was contaminated with mines, and the forest was full of wild animals, and the restless spirits of those who had died in the area.

In the early years of the village, few families were able to sustain a living in the forest, and those that did lived some distance from each other, concentrating on cutting down trees in order to be able to cultivate land, and living very separate lives. Even when more people began to arrive there was very little social cohesion and although the villagers inhabited the same physical area, there was little, if any social contact outside of their own immediate families.

Talking to the villagers it was clear that it took many years for people to feel that the village was their place, where they belonged. Many villagers had left their extended families behind, signifying a change in the social dynamics of family life. In Cambodia families are generally large, and usually include grandparents, parents, children, nieces and nephews and sometimes

cousins. When the villagers moved to the area, many left behind their established support structures, and, in addition, this meant that there were fewer people to work the land, making life just that little bit harder. People had to form new relationships, within the family, externally with other people living in the area, and also, in a lot of cases, with the land. Many villagers had to relearn skills that they had forgotten, such as rice growing, and had to begin to develop a new understanding of the hostile environment in which they found themselves living. A new environment, a new village, a new way of life, no support structure, no sense of belonging, land contaminated with mines, dense forest populated with wild animals and people on the edge of despair: all of these factors contributed to the feeling of alienation that many people experienced before they were able to establish their place in the village.

### **Part One: Villager conceptualisations of wellbeing:**

This section of the chapter explores what wellbeing is for the villagers - the ideal that they are striving to achieve. To do this I draw predominantly on the participatory photography and photo-elicitation interviews conducted with ten local people, in order to present wellbeing through their eyes. By using this method, any preconceived ideas that I had about the way that the local people conceptualised wellbeing were set aside, as the villagers led me through the images, explaining what they represented and why they were important. I begin this section by briefly discussing some of the methodological findings of using such an approach before moving on to the villager's conceptualisations of wellbeing.

It was sometimes surprising to hear the explanations behind the pictures. One image of a bowl of Cambodian noodles that had been taken by the monk revealed that on a literal level it meant sustenance for him, but on a deeper level, it related to the relationship he had with his parents who had died, as they used to make and sell noodles in order to support their family. It also represented an aspiration for the future, as he intended to make and sell noodles if he ever left the pagoda, which would enable him to live, and to honour the memory of his family. The noodles were therefore an image of his past, his present and his future and interwove the material, subjective and relational aspects of his wellbeing.

Figure 11: The monk's picture of Cambodian noodles



The photographs represented a different perspective from which to view wellbeing. Although the images showed specific physical objects such as rice growing in a field, cows grazing, friends and family, water, houses, the road, the pagoda, the school, money and so on, the participants were able to articulate a much deeper sense of meaning behind the photographs that went far beyond the initial literal interpretation of the images. I had been worried that it may have been difficult for the participants to take photographs that represented more conceptual aspects of wellbeing such as participation, health and relationships, but on that score I was proved very wrong. For example, WS, who owned a small shop, took a photograph of a tin of money. For her, money represented an important part of her life as it meant she could support her family, but it then led on to a discussion about the changes in the village that were taking place and how so many people were leaving, which meant she was worried about her business. From there, she then spoke about the importance of health to her wellbeing which was suffering because she was so concerned about the situation in the village that it had led to her developing stomach problems. The discussion then went full circle back to money as she was worried that she would not have enough to pay for treatment.

Figure 12: WS's picture of a tin of money



Despite the difference in age and sex of the villagers who took part in the participatory photography, there were a significant number of marked similarities between the photographs that were taken and the way that the villagers spoke about what they represented in terms of their wellbeing. This enabled me to draw together a number of factors that were important for the wellbeing of the people living in the community.

The most numerous photographs were of land, and rice growing.

Figure 13: FA's photograph of her field





Figure 14: MS's picture of his rice growing



For the villagers, land is one, if not the most important aspect of their lives and is linked in numerous ways to other aspects of their wellbeing. As several interviewees noted:

“If I have no land, I can do nothing.” NY, male villager

“When we have land, we are happy. We are happy in our lives.” AF, female villager

“This is like my hometown because I don’t have land anywhere else, just here. The land was my parents, but after my father died, my mother gave the land to me.”PY, male villager

These statements reveal that land is viewed not only as a source of livelihood, but is also considered to be a form of security that fosters a sense of belonging. The numerous images of fields and rice growing that the villagers took to photo-document what was important for their wellbeing confirmed the centrality of land in their lives. Nearly all of the villagers I interviewed identified themselves as farmers, who needed sufficient land to be able to grow enough rice to sustain their families throughout the year. The villagers’ relationship with the land was characterised by respect for the natural world and the surrounding environment and an innate connection with the changing cycles of nature. However, the material benefits that could be reaped from the land, were only one aspect of the intertwined relationship that the villagers had with the environment.

Figure 15: NY's daughter planting crops



Figure 16: WA's picture of her husband in their rice field



Land was also linked to family for the villagers, as it was through living and working together that close bonds were maintained. NY took pictures of his daughter working in the field, and talked about how pleased he was that he had been able to organize some farming workshops for his family and friends that helped them to grow rice and vegetables more productively. WA took an image of her husband standing in their rice field and spoke of the pride she felt that they could grow enough rice to feed them for the year and could walk safely on the land that they had cleared (of vegetation and mines). JS took pictures of the charcoal mounds he and his children had built together as well as an image of his son and daughter going to the fields to work. For him this represented the importance of family to his wellbeing, and highlighted the key role that land played in sustaining close relationships. By farming together, JS communicated his knowledge about the land to his children, thereby instilling certain values

and beliefs. Sharing these values and beliefs fostered family harmony, as they all worked together towards one goal – trying to build a better life for the future. In this way, JS and his family developed a greater feeling of belonging in the village, as the land anchored them in place, allowing them to put down roots that could literally and metaphorically grow stronger day by day. Working the land gave the villagers purpose, dignity and pride, as they slowly transformed the wild and dangerous forest into a habitable place.

Figure 17: Js's picture of making charcoal



Figure 18: JS's image of his children going to the fields



The villagers also revealed a spiritual connection with the surrounding environment, and spoke about the gods that governed the land and elements. In this way, the environment was viewed as a living being. While I was in the village, the rains were late in coming, which was a major concern for everyone. Several of the villagers believed that this was because the gods were



angry with them for not worshipping them. In an attempt to appease the gods, two rain-bringing ceremonies were held during my time in the village, which many of the villagers attended. The ceremonies involved men painting their faces and walking through the village banging drums and calling for rain, the sacrifice of a pig's head, and culminated in a blessing of the pond by the Buddhist monk. This shows a different aspect of the villager's relationship with the land, one that is shaped by a mixture of Animist, Hindu and Buddhist beliefs.

Figure 19: FA's photo of her friends at the pagoda



Spirituality was also an aspect of wellbeing that many of the older villagers spoke about. FA took images of her friends at the pagoda. She explained that for her, Buddhism and regularly visiting the pagoda was important for her spiritual wellbeing as she was now old and wanted to ensure she earned enough merit to pass on to her ancestors. She told me that it was important to go to the pagoda so that she could have *ch'ray t'la* which means having a clear mind with no anger, no ambition, and no ill feelings towards others. For her, the pagoda represented not only her religion, but the importance of social relationships in her life, as the pagoda was where she met with her friends who made up part of her support network as several of her children had moved away from the area. The monk also talked about the importance of the pagoda and explained that when the mines had been cleared from around the pagoda compound<sup>24</sup> and the road had been built, many more people could come to worship which greatly improved his sense of wellbeing. This reveals that the wat was central to the social and spiritual dimensions of the lives of the villagers and supports Colletta and

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<sup>24</sup> Landmines were deliberately laid near and around pagodas by the Khmer Rouge in order to try and stop people worshipping.

Cullen's (2000) assertion that social relations outside the family are organised around the temple as the heart of the village.

The villagers also spoke about having access to basic amenities such as food, water and shelter. FA, MS and WA all took photographs of their houses and spoke about their pride in having built more solid and permanent wooden and bamboo structures that were in stark contrast to the small bamboo shacks they had lived in when they first settled in the village. FA took images of a ditch of water and explained that by having this nearby she was able to easily access water for herself, her family and her animals. Cows were seen as an important aspect of peoples' lives as they represented security for the future, an insurance policy as it were. By breeding livestock, several of the villagers were able to profit from selling the calves that were born, and in addition, if a family member became ill, they were able to sell the cows to pay for treatment. Additionally, as FL explained, cows were a means of production and helped her to plough her rice fields, and could also be a source of food if the need arose. Having access to shelter, food, water and owning livestock can therefore be seen as being central to wellbeing for the people in the village – the material things they needed for life to be good.

Figure 20: FA's cows



Figure 21: FL's photograph of her cows



Figure 22: PY's picture of his cow



Family and friends also featured heavily in the photographs that the villagers took, revealing that close relationships with others were an important facet of having what they needed for life to be good. FA showed me an image of herself with her family who had just arrived back in the village after several years spent living in Thailand. She explained that she was much happier now that her family was living with her again, and was no longer lonely. NA took pictures of her granddaughter helping her to make noodles, her only source of income in the village as she had very little land. She spoke with pride about the help her grandchildren gave her. However, she was also worried that her daughter would soon be leaving with the children as she did not have any money and needed to find work in another province. NY also took pictures of his daughter and grandson, as well as his close friends who provided him with emotional support while his wife was away working in a shoe factory in Phnom Penh. As many

of the people who had settled in the village had left behind extended families in their search for land, close family and the relationships that they had with friends and neighbours in the community were an important part of their lives. Establishing good relations with those around them allowed a sense of belonging to develop, as they were able to establish their own place socially and physically within the village community.

Figure 23: FA and her family



Figure 24: FL and her children





Figure 25: NY's house and grandson



Figure 26: NA and her granddaughter making noodles



Health was another recurrent theme in the interviews I conducted in the village. As WS's reflections on her deteriorating health reveal, paying for medical care is a significant burden for the people in the village. As HP, a national mine action actor stated, "Health care has killed most of the wealth of people in the community." Numerous villagers talked to me about the impoverishment that they had faced when a family member became ill, many of whom had had to sell possessions, livestock and in many cases, nearly all of their land in order to raise enough money to pay for medical treatment. One family explained that they had come to the village after they had been forced to sell their land in another district in order to pay for their father's medical care. This was a familiar story, and one that was told again and again by many of the villagers. BF, an elderly man told me that when he was young he had a big house and lots of land, but when his grandfather became ill his family had to sell everything to pay for his



treatment. After they sold everything they moved around a lot until they eventually ended up in the village. He said that he literally had nothing apart from a pot to cook rice and spoons to eat with. BR explained that as there was no health clinic in the village he and his family had to travel some distance to buy medicine if someone became ill. While the cost of medicines negatively affects the villagers, the lack of nearby clinics and health professionals also has a detrimental effect, particularly in times of emergency when quick access to health care is essential. Maintaining a good level of health was therefore an essential aspect of wellbeing for the villagers.

Education was also viewed as an important part of what the villagers needed for life to be good, as it was seen as essential for securing a better future for their children. Many of the villagers were illiterate, and few had studied past primary level. FA took a photograph of the primary school in the village and explained, "When we have the school we are happy because our children can go and study. It is important for our lives because they can do something with their lives. If we have education we can do everything; if we have no education we cannot do anything." FL also spoke about the importance of sending her children to school. She said, "When the children have an education, it's not difficult if they want to make a business. The business will keep improving when they have a little education."

The final facet of wellbeing that the villagers spoke about was the necessity of having a sense of security for life to be good. This took the form not only of having land as a means of livelihood and as an insurance policy for when times became even harder, being physically safe, but also in maintaining good relations with neighbours and others in the community. Avoiding trouble with others was another issue raised by several villagers. As MS stated, "In this village, I am not afraid of robbers or thieves. In this village they always say that if you don't step on someone else then you will have no trouble. So for myself I have never had any trouble with anyone else. I never feel afraid of robbers or thieves." ES recalled how he had been robbed several times in the previous village he had lived in, leaving him with very little materially. Following two years working as a labourer in Thailand, where he was again robbed repeatedly, he saved enough money to buy a small amount of land, and chose to return to the village as a place he knew as a soldier fighting against the KR. The villagers also explained that feeling physically safe was important for their wellbeing. As MY explained, having the freedom to travel wherever she wanted to without fear of being injured by a landmine made her life much better.

The images that the villagers took and the subsequent discussions we had about the photographs reveal that wellbeing and having what they need for life to be good revolves around land. From land they have sustenance and security, engendering feelings of pride and dignity at being able to support themselves and their families. Land also anchors them in place, creating a feeling of belonging. In addition, having access to shelter, sufficient food and nearby water is viewed as essential for material wellbeing, as is owning livestock and staying healthy. Spiritual wellbeing is attained by regularly attending the pagoda, offering alms in order to gain merit for ancestors and practicing Buddhism. Finally, the importance of relationships - with family and friends, with neighbours, and with the environment – is emphasised as a key component of wellbeing. This highlights the importance of considering social as well as socioecological relations when researching wellbeing.

The above discussion of wellbeing gives an insight into the ideal that the villagers are endeavouring to achieve. However, the presence of landmines represents a threat to the lives and wellbeing of local people by contaminating the environment in which they live. It is to the impact that these remnants of war have on the lives of the villagers that this chapter will now turn.

## **Part Two: Living in a contaminated landscape:**

For many rural people living in Cambodia, life is hard, as they have to try and sustain a living through subsistence farming. With over 35% of the population living in poverty, predominantly in rural areas, material deprivation is high, and living standards are low. The presence of landmines exacerbates an already difficult situation by adding another hazard that has to be overcome if they are to survive. Talking to the villagers gave me an insight into their lives before any clearance had taken place. The villagers identified two main impacts of landmines, which mirrored those mentioned by the mine action actors: landmine accidents and the effect this had on individuals and their families and the difficulties of living with the continual presence of mines. I begin with the impact of landmine accidents before moving on to outline the different ways that the lives of the villagers were affected when they lived within a contaminated landscape.

### **7.1 Landmine accidents:**

Landmines are designed to maim and kill, and different types of mines result in different types of injury that can range from death to the loss of hands, arms, feet and legs, blindness, brain injuries and physical scarring depending on how close individuals were when the mine

exploded. But what of people injured by landmines? How are their lives affected? And how does their position within society change? This section of the chapter explores these issues by considering JS's story, a village man injured by an AT mine explosion in 2001. In doing so, I offer an analysis of the values underpinning social relations in rural Cambodia that reveals difference is derided, signs of weakness (physical, mental and emotional) are unwelcome and face must be maintained at all costs.

There were a number of people living in the village who had been injured and lost limbs as a result of landmine explosions. One man I got to know well had been involved in a mine explosion in the village in 2001, near to where the VC's compound is now situated. On one of several visits to his home, as we sat under a tree in the shade, JS talked about his accident, his subsequent rehabilitation and the decision he made after years of recuperation to return to live in the place where he had nearly lost his life. At times it was obvious that he was physically uncomfortable, and his leg was causing him pain, but at no time did he vocalise this, but preferred instead to talk about the journey he had undertaken, both physically and mentally following the landmine accident. Showing no outward sign of weakness was important for JS, as it was clear he did not seek or welcome pity, but instead wanted the opportunity to tell his story so that people could better understand the situation he and many thousands of other people injured by landmines in Cambodia continue to face.

JS explained that he had been travelling through the forest with his son when the ox cart he was driving ran over an AT mine, detonating it, injuring both himself and his son. His right leg was badly injured, and he was taken to the hospital in Battambang by some of the other villagers. To pay for his medical treatment, he and his wife were forced to sell all the timber he had cut down to build a more substantial house, their livestock and nearly all their possessions. Having spent nearly two years in and out of hospital, he then moved back to live with his family in a former residence within Battambang Province near a lake. There he tried to make a living as a fisherman, but because of the injury to his leg he was unsteady on his feet and kept falling into the water. At the time he was being supported financially by a distant relative living in America who sent him money on a monthly basis, and had also become involved with a religious NGO who assisted him by providing funds for fishing nets and other necessary equipment. However, with a growing family, his inability to sustain a living through fishing and the knowledge that he had a plot of land back in the village that could be cultivated, he made the difficult decision to return. He said:

“We need to help ourselves. I had difficulties in my life and I thought if I don’t come, then I won’t have any land. And my children will not have anything.”

However, once he returned he found that someone had burnt down his bamboo house and looted the sparse possessions that had not been sold to pay for his medical treatment. In addition, his relative in America stopped the monthly payments as a protest to JS moving back to the village where he had been injured. This left him with only the small amount of money that the religious NGO had given to him, which he used to buy tools in order to work the land. He then began the slow process of clearing the vegetation from his plot, so that he could plant and cultivate rice. He explained that gradually over the years he worked hard until he was able to support himself and his family through subsistence farming. He saved the small amount of money he was able to make from selling surplus crops when there was a good harvest, and invested in better farming equipment which could be used to increase crop yields. However, other people were jealous of his ability to save and plan for the future, and criticised him for refusing to lend them seeds or money. This resulted in him shying away from social contact with the other villagers as he concentrated on the wellbeing of himself and his family. Although he was still indebted to the religious NGO, and had taken out a number of other loans during times of hardship, he was, when I met him, in a position to sustain a living. He had also made the decision to re-integrate himself back into the community and was the co-founder of the Village Association, which was a small-scale community saving and farming scheme, with 14 members that was started in 2011.

JS’s story highlights a number of different issues relating to the impact of landmine accidents on the material, relational and subjective wellbeing of individuals and their families. The first is the cost and availability of medical treatment for those people who have been involved in a landmine accident. Immediate survival following a mine explosion is dependent upon the severity of the injury, the proximity to emergency medical services and in many cases, the ability and capacity of local people to adequately administer emergency first aid at the scene. In rural Cambodia, the likelihood of an ambulance arriving at the scene in time to treat an individual is extremely remote, if not unheard of. People are more likely to be bundled into the back of a pick-up truck or sandwiched between the driver and passenger on a moped and driven along pitted dirt roads to the nearest clinic or hospital which may be tens of miles away. In addition, as the health system in the country was decimated during the KR period, and to this day remains under-developed and barely capable of dealing with the types of injuries sustained by the majority of people hurt by landmines, many people who may have survived in

other countries with better health care systems die due to the lack of facilities and emergency medical treatment.

In the longer term, continuing treatment is dependent upon the ability of the individual and their families to pay for medicine, treatment and other expenses while the patient is in hospital. Medical costs are not, however, the only economic impact of landmine accidents on individuals and their families. Depending upon the severity of the injury, rehabilitation can take several years and in the meantime, the family need to earn a living without, in many instances, the main breadwinner. As subsistence farming is hard manual labour, and for amputees who do not use prosthetic limbs, and even those who do, cultivating land and farming rice is extremely difficult. Several of the villagers spoke about people being injured by landmines no longer being able to work, and the strain this placed on the rest of the family to spend more hours in the fields working just to survive. PO, a community development mine action actor explained that when a man is injured, the children often have to leave school in order to tend the fields or sell their labour to earn money, and the woman has to work twice as hard just to make an income that can support the whole family.

In some cases, families are unable to earn enough to sustain themselves, and take out loans against their land, which carries its own dangers if repayments cannot be maintained. JS told me about his neighbour, who had also been severely injured by a landmine explosion losing both an arm and a leg. He said,

“In the past some people in this village lost their land and their farms. You see the house with the man who is missing the leg over there? His land is almost gone now. He has only just 20 x 100 m of land. He used to farm, but he didn’t have any of his own money, so he took a loan from the bank. He had to hire someone to plough the land, pay for seeds and pay the workers. The money that he borrowed from the bank continued to increase because of the interest. He needed to get a loan from the bank for harvesting. Then he needed to get a loan from the bank for fertilizer. That caused him to sell the land.” JS, male villager

The subsequent impacts following a mine accident can therefore be seen to lead to material deprivation. If the family of someone injured by a landmine is unable to support itself, this creates a downward spiral as people take out loans to pay for longer-term medical care and day-to-day living. Debt then begins to escalate as further loans are sought to pay the interest

on original loans. This then becomes a vicious cycle, as people become more and more indebted, resulting ultimately in the sale of land. Once land has been sold, there is no means of sustaining a living, and money can no longer be borrowed, as there is nothing to offset the loans against. This means that people injured by landmines are sometimes left in an extremely precarious position as they have no land, no assets and only a limited capacity to earn money labouring for other people, which places an inordinate strain on the rest of the family, who then struggle to find some way of sustaining a living.

Equally as important as material wellbeing, is the relational aspect of peoples' quality of life, which is correspondingly affected when a landmine explosion injures a person. For JS and his family, their social isolation from the rest of the community began when they had to move over 50km away so that he could be treated at the hospital. He was then physically isolated on his return to the village because his injury meant that he could not walk far to visit others, emphasising his social exclusion, as most of his time was spent working in the field, which his children helped him access. He was also isolated from his relatives overseas because of his decision to return to the village. Coupled with his alienation from other villagers because of his refusal to lend money, which added to the social isolation he experienced, he had no choice but to become self-reliant, as he could not rely on outside assistance. However, he did have the support of his immediate family, which many people injured by landmines do not have.

People with disabilities are often stigmatized within Cambodian society, despite national anti-discrimination disability laws, and the prevalence of amputees in the country. It is reported that women who are hurt and sustain a disability following a landmine accident are often abandoned by their husbands, or have difficulties finding a partner if they are single. Many people with disabilities, including amputees face prejudice and discrimination on a daily basis. I observed this kind of stigmatization first hand during my time in the village. There were several men who had been injured by landmines living in the village, but one man in particular was an object of curiosity and derision. He had lost both an arm and a leg to a landmine accident and was rarely seen outside of the compound of his house. One day there was a village meeting that he attended. He started off by sitting outside the VCs house in full view of the rest of the community. However, as the meeting progressed it was clear that he was becoming more and more uncomfortable with the stares and comments from those around him, particularly the children, who pointed at him and laughed, and he soon moved into a less prominent place where the majority of people could not see him. This highlights the social isolation that some

people face following an accident, as in some cases it is easier to remain at home rather than face the prejudice and discrimination of the community.

While JS had adjusted to life after his accident, many people injured by landmines have more difficulty adapting to their new situations. Using alcohol as a coping mechanism was something I observed during my time in the village. One man in the village who had lost a leg in a landmine accident was part of the VC's working group and as such had a certain position of power within the community. However, on every occasion I saw him, which was quite frequently, he was either drunk or drinking, and often had to be carried home by his friends. This type of alcohol abuse is not uncommon among people injured by mines, and may lead to other negative consequences for their families. Heavy drinking can lead to an increase in domestic violence, and as one national mine action actor explained, may result in the wife running away, leaving the man without work or family so that he has to resort to begging just to survive.

People involved in landmine accidents also suffer emotionally and psychologically. PO, a community development mine action actor explained that many people sink into depression following an accident, which negatively affects themselves and the rest of the family. He explained:

"The behaviour of the victim is not normal. You can say that they have a very deep depression, much depression. Some people in the community, they drink, because they cannot work. They cannot work, the children cannot go to school, and they have to sell labour to support the family. And the wife, the woman has to work double to get income, to support the family." CS, national mine action actor

JS explained that he suffered in silence for many years following his accident. He spoke about the months where he lay recovering from his injuries feeling totally hopeless, but in order to support his family he decided to keep his grief to himself and tried to make the best of the situation. He said:

"I struggle and I try to do everything I can to make my life better. When things make me want to shout, I keep silent; when things make me want to cry, I just smile. What does this sentence mean? It means that I wish the gods would help me, but I have to try myself too. It's like my injury; I got hurt, but I tried to smile. Yes, the things that

make me want to shout, I try and keep calm and stay silent. And when things make me want to cry, I just smile.” JS, male villager

By remaining silent about the physical pain he was in and internalising his problems, JS masked his inner turmoil, which allowed him to project a positive self-image, with no overt sign of weakness to the rest of the community. Maintaining face in this way, is not just the preserve of people injured by landmines, but is an important facet of Khmer culture, and one that I came across on a daily basis. People often downplayed the hardships they had encountered in their lives, and for the main part told their stories pragmatically and without becoming emotional. Instead they focused on the positive changes in their wellbeing as their situation gradually improved, demonstrating resilience and an ability to adapt to the difficult situations they had found themselves living in.

The effect of landmine accidents on individuals and their families can therefore be seen to encompass a variety of different aspects, and recovering from such a trauma places a massive strain on their everyday lives and wellbeing. The cost is both financial and human, short term and long term, and has direct and indirect impacts that have ramifications for all family members. Landmine accidents and the resultant injuries can lead to people becoming depressed, isolated, stigmatized and can end in the breakdown of family relationships, in some cases due to increased levels of alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Paying for treatment can impoverish families and results in changes in the dynamics of family life, often meaning that children are forced to curtail their education in order to support their parents by selling labour or working in the fields. Their lives become more difficult as they are physically unable to work as they used to, and it becomes more of a struggle to earn enough to support their families. Their place within the community may diminish, resulting in a sense of social detachment and isolation that is further confounded by prejudice and discrimination from others who deride them because their physical bodies are no longer whole. The resultant loss of self-esteem and dignity and feelings of hopelessness, exacerbate an already difficult situation, negatively affecting wellbeing of mind, body and spirit.

## **7.2 Living in a contaminated landscape:**

If, as Gelser (1992) contends, therapeutic landscapes are defined as settings or milieus that are beneficial for the health and wellbeing of people, I contend that places that bear the scars of past conflict and trauma can be conceptualised as contaminated landscapes, places that negatively affect the wellbeing of people. In this particular context, the village location that



was heavily polluted with mines constitutes a contaminated landscape, where the people lived in a continual state of crisis. Every day the villagers faced life-threatening situations, and had to make a choice between starving or entering suspected hazardous land in order to find food and water. This supports Vigh's (2000) assertion that for many people living in the developing world, normalisation of the extreme situations people live in has meant that crisis has become context.

This part of the chapter documents the villagers' understandings of the ways that the continual presence of landmines affected their lives, which is broken down into three sections. The first section explores the different types of fear that the villagers experienced when living in a contaminated landscape. The second section considers the villager's struggle to physically survive when surrounded by mines. The third section explores how the presence of mines affected social relations. Running through each section is the theme of socioecological relations highlighting the intertwined relationship that the villagers have with the land and the wider environment.

### **7.2.1 Living in fear**

There is little doubt that living with the continual presence of landmines places an inordinate psychological strain on people that colours every facet of their daily lives. All of the villagers I interviewed talked about how afraid they were living in the village before any mine clearance had taken place. The fear was on different levels and encompassed anxiety and worry about the presence of landmines as well as trepidation about living in the forest. The mines threatened the safety of individuals, their families and their livestock, whereas the forest represented danger, not only because of the wild animals, but also because of the restless spirits thought to dwell there.

#### **7.2.1.1 Fear of mines:**

The majority of villagers I interviewed spoke about the fear they felt living amongst remnants of war and the constant stress this placed them under. As several villagers explained:

“Before, even when I was asleep or was walking, I was always thinking about where I could go because if I went this way there were mines, and if I went another way, there were mines there too. I thought that when I first came here that it was very difficult. I couldn't go out to work for someone else because I was afraid. I was afraid of the landmines.” PA, female villager

“I felt very overwhelmed at that time. When I hadn’t seen the land I thought that I wanted to live here. But when I got here I saw that there were a lot of landmines, and CMAC had not come here yet so I felt overwhelmed and I really wanted to go back to my hometown.” FO, female villager

“Oh I’m afraid and I can’t go anywhere. I only own a small amount of land, you know. Outside my house maybe 2 or 3 metres, I cannot jump out from that.” NY, male villager

These quotes demonstrate how the fear of mines was a constant companion for many of the villagers before any clearance had taken place, which permeated every aspect of their lives. Knowing that there were mines in the area, but having no way of identifying exactly where they were sown placed an inordinate emotional strain on the villagers, engendering feelings of hopelessness. It also shrank the space that they could safely venture into, resulting in both physical and social isolation.

The villagers also spoke about being afraid of being killed or injured by a landmine, and the concern they had for the safety of themselves, their families, and also their animals. Livestock, particularly cows, were a valuable commodity for the villagers. Several villagers explained that they did not let their cows wander in the forest to graze, as they were worried that the animals would be killed or injured if they stepped on a mine. This placed an additional burden on the villagers to find food not only to feed themselves, but also their livestock.

Maintaining the safety of children was another issue for many of the villagers. A number of villagers explained that they tried to keep their children close to home to stop them being injured by mines, but this was not always possible. The landmine literature documents that many cases of landmine accidents are a result of children’s innate curiosity to touch and play with objects they find. This was supported by a number of young people I interviewed who spoke about finding and playing with mines when they were younger. LB, a young man in the village, told me how he found a mine one day and started to play with it, as he did not understand what he had in his hands. The VC saw him, and shouted at him to put it down, which frightened the young man, who recalled that he never played with a mine again. Another boy in the village, FB, talked to me about his experiences of finding a mine while playing in the forest with his friends. He said:

“I went to the forest to play with some children. I climbed a tree and fell down right next to a mine, but luckily it didn’t explode. The mine was between my legs. I think there are still mines there because no one has been to check the area and they are hard to see.” FB, boy in the village

These stories demonstrate the limiting effect that the presence of landmines has on children’s ability to play freely and safely. BM explained that before clearance had taken place, many people did not send their children to school in the next village because the only way to get there was along a forest path. Many children in the village worked in the fields and were responsible for looking after cattle. Speaking to them I found that they were often more aware of where the mines were in the village than some of the adults, particularly the women. Although most of them knew not to touch the mines, they were not as fearful as the older villagers that I interviewed, signifying how for them, the mines had been a constant presence in their lives, something that they had grown up with and a part of their everyday landscape.

There had been a number of landmine accidents in the village, and several people recalled one particular incident where a man and his son had been severely injured when their ox and cart detonated an AT mine in 2001. This served as a stark warning for the villagers, heightening the level of fear, as they had witnessed first-hand the devastating injuries that mines inflict on people involved in explosions. A number of villagers recalled their early years in the village and how they had to learn to live with the presence of mines. LH spoke about his life when he first arrived in the village from Siem Reap province. He was formerly a soldier and had fought in the area so was aware that both government and KR forces had laid mines. When he and his wife first arrived in the village he recalled how fearful they felt of the mines and of the fact that there was no nearby hospital or clinic if a landmine explosion injured them. He recounted how afraid he felt when venturing into the forest because he did not know where the mines were and how this made it difficult and dangerous to clear the vegetation from his plot of land. MB echoed this sentiment, and told me about the time when he began to clear his land so that he could cultivate rice. He explained that he used to pick up any mines that he found in his bare hands and put them on a tree stump. Although he felt afraid, he explained that he had no other choice. Endangering his life in this way demonstrates how desperate the situation was at that time for the villagers, and how fear had to be set aside if people wanted to stay and continue to live in such a harsh environment.

Despite the presence of mines, the villagers had to find some way of sustaining a living. This meant that each day, men and women, boys and girls made the decision to walk into a suspected hazardous area in order to survive. Risk taking can therefore be seen to be part and parcel of the everyday lives of the people living in the mine-affected village. Time and time again the same phrase came up when I talked to and interviewed the villagers: we knew it was dangerous, but we had no choice, we had to take the risk. While the women tended to stay closer to their homes, they still went into mined areas to forage for vegetables in the forest and to collect water. The men and boys went further afield in order to hunt, but also to collect firewood.

#### **7.2.1.2 Fear of the forest:**

Living in the forest was a new undertaking for most of the people who came to the village, and presented a challenge in itself, that was made worse by the presence of landmines. The villagers were afraid of the forest, and the wild animals that lived there, and were also fearful of the restless spirits of people who had died or been killed in the area.

WB spoke about the isolation of living in such a place where you could not see or even hear your neighbours, because the trees and bamboo were so dense. The only sounds at night were of wild animals, which she feared. She explained that she had built a small bamboo house on stilts and lit a fire underneath it each night to keep the animals away. MS told a similar story and recalled how very few people were able to live in such harsh conditions. He explained that most people would come in the daytime to chop down trees to sell as firewood and then leave again in the evening. As he had no land anywhere else, he stayed in the forest, and slept near the fire he built each evening. He explained how afraid he was when his cows stampeded one night after they had caught the scent of a tiger. Another villager explained:

“Before it was full of forest around here and we did not dare to walk there. I could only go 5 meters away from my house.” FA, female villager

It can be seen that physically living in such circumstances was difficult for the villagers. Not only did they have to contend with the mines that lay hidden beneath the ground, but they also had to worry about wild animals while trying to carve out a literal and physical livelihood in the forest.

There was also a more intangible fear of living in a place where many people had died. ST, an elderly woman, told me that she was afraid of landmines and of dying when she first came to the village, as she knew many people had died in the area. There was also talk of ghost lights that were seen from time to time in the village, which were said to be the restless spirits of those who had died a violent death. A number of the villagers talked about the bodily remains of people that they had found in the forest, and their fear of ghosts, as these people had not had a proper burial ceremony. CW explained how afraid she was when she found some human remains near her house. She told me that after she had collected the bones and put them in a plastic bag and moved them away from her home, she was no longer frightened of the ghost. Interestingly she did not hold any form of ceremony to consecrate the remains, or to lay the deceased person to rest, but believed instead that moving the skeleton away from her home would be enough to protect her from the spirit. This was at odds with the majority of other villagers who had strong beliefs about the way that the spirits of dead people should be treated, and took part in a variety of rituals to protect themselves from being harmed by these beings.

Certain people in the village were deemed to be magical, and some were called upon to undertake evil spirit exorcisms, while others were viewed as being able to channel the gods to predict when the rains would come. All of the children wore protection amulets to ward off evil spirits and I witnessed a ceremony performed on a small baby who would not stop crying, which the parents believed was the result of an evil spirit possessing its body. Many of the men had protection tattoos, which they had etched on their bodies during the KR period to keep them safe from evil spirits and being injured by landmines. A former Government soldier, HD, told a story about his platoon commander who had a protection tattoo on his leg. One day the soldiers came across some mines, and the commander said that he was not afraid as he was protected, so walked into the minefield, stepped on a mine and subsequently lost a leg. The absolute faith that the man had in the protection tattoos that marked his body overrode a more practical analysis of the situation, causing him to risk life and limb. This reveals how strong the belief in magic is for some Khmer people, which can, as in this case, have devastating consequences.

Although many of the restless souls deemed to inhabit the forest were feared, not all were thought to have evil intentions. One man injured by a landmine, JS, told a story about being lost in the forest one day and being very scared as he could not find his way out. He told me

that he heard the voices of people who had died in the forest warning him to get away from the forest and never come back. However, he had to hunt to provide for his family and returned to the same area, only to be involved in a landmine explosion the very next day.

There was no doubt that many of the villagers felt uneasy in certain parts of the village. Many people would avoid the places where they knew landmines had exploded for fear of the ghosts and restless spirits of people who had died there. Indeed, many tales were told during my time in the village, and few people would venture out on the nights when the dogs were howling as this was seen as a sign that evil spirits were abroad. It can therefore be seen that fear of the forest and the restless spirits thought to live there was another factor that negatively affected the villager's wellbeing. Worrying not only about the landmines, but also the harm that the spirits could cause them when venturing into the forest meant that people were frightened of both the physical and supernatural dangers residing in their surrounding environment.

Living in constant fear can be seen to have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of the villagers that permeated every aspect of life from the moment they woke up until the time they went to sleep. Fear of mines, fear for the safety of themselves and their families, fear of the physical properties of the forest and the wild animals that lived there coupled with the fear of malevolent restless spirits all placed an enormous amount of psychological pressure on the villagers. This was coupled with the difficulties the villagers faced trying to sustain a living in such a hostile environment, which this chapter will now move on to discuss.

### **7.2.2 Struggling to survive:**

Materially, the villagers had very little – many had been refugees with few belongings, while others had travelled across the country with only the possessions they could carry. Standards of living were therefore low and they were reliant on themselves to carve out a living in the hostile environment of the forest. Accessing basic amenities such as water and food were major concerns for most villagers, who spoke about the dangers they faced on a daily basis and the calculated risks that they took going into suspected hazardous areas in order to survive. A sense of hopelessness and an inability to plan for the long term highlighted the day-by-day living that most people struggled with, and there was an emphasis on having to live in this way because there was no other choice. Many villagers talked about the limited environment they had to live in, being hemmed in by landmines on all sides, resulting in an isolated and claustrophobic existence that hampered their livelihood activities.

As a basic necessity for life, water, or the lack of it, was an issue that was raised by nearly every villager I interviewed as they recalled their first years in the village. WB spoke about the difficulty of collecting water, as there was no river in the area, no wells, and no pond. In rainy season she placed pieces of plastic in holes in the ground that were the result of landmine explosions and waited for the rain to fill them up. This is an extraordinary image that shows both the opportunities and threats that people encountered when living amongst remnants of war. Utilising craters as a source of water meant that on the positive side she did not have to travel a long distance to find fresh water, but on the negative side, meant that there was a greater likelihood of further mines being in the vicinity that could be detonated when she walked through the forest, as they are rarely laid singly, but rather in groups or clusters. Several other villagers spoke about the difficulties they had collecting and keeping sufficient water to drink, wash and cook with:

“Before it was difficult to live here. I wanted to go back because it was difficult for water and for everything. Even food was difficult.” FO, female villager

“You know, there was no road, everywhere was forest. I had to walk from early morning to night to bring water, and there were lots of mines. I jumped only on the marks of the animals, I just stepped on them [the footprints]. If I stepped outside them there were mines.” NY, male villager

“I first came to live here in 1998. It was miserable here because I had no water. I had to take water from KP and I had nothing to eat. I used to go and find big spiders in the forest to eat. When I talk about the past I want to cry.” WY, female villager

“In the past there was a shortage of water, and we didn’t know what to do. There was a lot of forest around here and a lot of landmines too. Normally we tried to forage in the forest for wood to use for fencing, so that we could sell it because we were poor. The problem was that we had no money and we had no food. Some people went to the forest, even though they were afraid of the landmines.” PY, male villager

Another woman, BP, explained that she had to use the water that she washed the rice in to then wash her body as there was nowhere where she could bathe and she had nothing in which to store a large quantity of water. Some families occasionally pooled their resources: one had an ox, one had a cart, and they travelled the 15 km to the lake where they could

collect water in plastic containers to take back to their homes. The journey took them the whole day and meant that they were unable to engage in other livelihood activities. Other people explained that they had to walk to the lake, and could therefore only carry a small amount of water. Yet others had bicycles, which they used to carry water, but talked about the difficulties of trying to travel during rainy season because there were no roads and the forest paths became extremely muddy making travelling even harder than usual. They all relied for the main part on their own initiative and concentrated on their own family's survival.

Trying to grow and gather enough food to sustain themselves and their families was another major concern for the villagers. Although the area was contaminated with mines, this did not stop the villagers claiming plots of land. Every villager I interviewed recalled how they had had to chop down trees, bamboo and vegetation by themselves in order to clear an area large enough to grow rice. This was hard physical work, made dangerous by the presence of mines that often took several years to complete. As several villagers noted:

“So when we chopped down the trees ourselves we were very afraid of mines. We were afraid of the landmines, but we are poor, so we had to take the risk...I don't know how many times I cheated death then.” MS, male villager

“Landmines affect people because people cannot go out to work. When the landmines were around here, even though we wanted to go out to forage for food and vegetables, it was difficult. It caused us to take risks. Sometimes people died, sometimes people lost legs and hands. We couldn't go out and the mines affected people badly: on the farm, in the forest, even though we wanted to grow rice or other crops, we couldn't because we were afraid of landmines. If I wanted to walk or go by motorbike I had to follow the path that someone had already taken.” MY, female villager

“There were many mines. I can't make a rice farm or keep cows. Outside we have no way to feed the family so it's difficult too.” NY, male village

Having to choose between providing for their families and entering suspected hazardous areas, necessity won out over fear, resulting in villagers endangering their lives on a daily basis. This demonstrates the villagers' determination to establish a new life in a new place. A number of villagers recalled how hopeless they felt living in such conditions, a hand-to-mouth existence



with little hope for the future. One woman, FA, explained that even though she knew the mines were there she still went to the forest to cut down trees to sell as firewood because she had no other choice, and no other way of earning any money. She told me how scared she felt, but she wanted to feed her family, and had no other means to do so. Another villager, NY, told me that although he was afraid he still ventured into the forest to hunt and forage for food. He explained that he used to walk precisely on the animal tracks he found in the forest to make sure that he did not step on a mine. Taking risks in order to survive therefore became part and parcel of everyday life for the villagers.

### **7.3 Adaptation and transformation of socioecological relations:**

The presence of landmines transforms the relationship that people have with the environment. This was highlighted by one villager, BD, who spoke about finding mines in her field that were planted in rows like crops. This analogy is interesting as it provides an insight into the way the woman related to the land – as a means of production, a place that allows crops to be grown that enables people to sustain a living. However, with mines being seeded instead of rice, a field that should provide sustenance instead becomes a field of danger. In this way, it can be seen that land, instead of being a nurturing provider, becomes a threat to people, a form of direct and indirect violence that negatively affects wellbeing in a number of ways. Materially, people were in danger of being injured or killed by mines, and had difficulty accessing the necessities for survival such as food and water. Relationally, people were isolated from others within the community and further afield because the minefields reduced their freedom to travel, both short and longer distances. Subjectively, living in fear created misery, and reduced feelings of self-worth. However, despite the difficulties of living in such a harsh environment, the villagers showed remarkable tenacity and resilience, persevering with their endeavours until they had established a village that supported over 600 people in 2012.

Whereas in the past the forest was viewed as a wild and dangerous place, the antithesis of the village as the home of order and civilisation (Chandler 1982), for the villagers it offered an opportunity for a new life. Despite the presence of mines, the villagers moved into the forest, and set about cutting down trees and vegetation, taming the wild, in order to establish their place in the world. The forest represented somewhere they could set down roots and develop a sense of belonging. This required adapting and transforming their relationship with the environment – physically, emotionally and spiritually. The villagers would not have had the opportunity to hold land without venturing into suspected hazardous areas. This supports

Arensen's (2008) assertion that mine-contaminated areas represent both promise and peril for people.

While many of the villagers now have land that they can more easily cultivate, this has also come at a cost. Mine clearance involves a certain amount of deforestation, as large ground clearing machines are utilised to clear vegetation before demining can take place. Further deforestation takes place when people clear trees and vegetation in order to make way for farmland. In the past, the village was densely forested, with both trees and bamboo, but while I lived in the village, there were very few trees remaining, and no bamboo. This raises the question of whether it is environmentally sustainable for mine clearance to continue in the same way, using large machines the size of bulldozers to demolish everything in their path. This is an issue that is now being considered by the mine action sector, although no consensus has yet been reached about the best way to proceed.

The climate and changes in the weather were another topic much discussed by the villagers, as they play a key part in farming life. The previous year was devastating for many villagers as the rains came very late and when they did arrive there was a massive amount of flooding which resulted in the crops being washed away. The inability to grow enough rice to feed the family for a year was a major concern for everyone, and people were visibly worried during my time in the village, as again the rainy season had not started when it was due to, the ponds were running dry and the fields were arid. ST, told me that she had borrowed money to invest in her farm and would not be able to pay it back if the harvest was poor again. Other villagers reiterated this concern about being unable to harvest enough crops that season:

"Like right now, we have no rain, so maybe the harvest will be poor as the rice cannot grow very well. Normally for one hectare of land we can harvest 20 sacks of rice, but if there is no rain like now, we will only get 9 or 10 sacks of rice per hectare. So that would not be enough to support the family for the whole year." PY, male villager

"I have a big worry in my mind about the rain. If there is no rain and the crops dry up, this is my big worry. If there is enough rain I expect that I will have enough food in the future and then I would feel happy and would have no worries." AF, female villager

I asked several of the villagers why they believed the rains were late, and was interested to learn that there were two distinct groups of thought. Some villagers believed that the gods of

the land and elements were angry with them, and arranged for various gifts to be offered to them by way of appeasement. The other group of villagers believed that the changes in the weather patterns were due to the massive amounts of deforestation that had taken place in the village and surrounding area. As one woman told me:

“I think maybe it is because the forest is gone, so it could not absorb the rain. Because there was a lot of forest here and there was enough rain. I think that because they destroyed a lot of the forest here, even on the mountain, the trees have gone as well, in order for them to grow corn – it looks very very strange. On the mountain now there is no forest.” AF, female villager

Whatever the reasons for the changes in the weather and climate, the inherent link between people and the land and the land and people was being badly affected, resulting in a decrease in both environmental and human wellbeing in the village. The villagers’ conceptualisations of landmines impact in terms of living in fear and struggling to survive demonstrate the importance of place for wellbeing. The environment in which people are situated has a direct bearing on their experiences of life. This highlights the utility of a wellbeing ecology approach, as without considering socioecological relations, little sense can be made of the villagers’ understandings of the ways that landmines affect their lives.

#### **7.4 Social relations in a contaminated landscape:**

Cambodia is a patriarchal hierarchical society (Ledgerwood 2007), where people’s position is determined by a number of physical factors and social attributes that cannot or are difficult to change, such as age, sex, wealth, employment and political position (Oveson et al 1996). During the time of heavy mine contamination, the struggle to survive and settle in a new environment overrode the necessity of maintaining a strict social hierarchy. Instead, the villagers’ social status was more egalitarian based around their abilities, skills and knowledge. Despite the constraining physical environment in which they were living, there was a certain degree of freedom of identity, as the villagers were no longer limited by societal labels that pre-determined how they should behave, speak and relate to others. Instead, because they were engaged in a common struggle – the search for land and the securing of livelihood – everyone was equally disadvantaged, creating a new starting point from which to base social relations. The necessity to survive in a forested environment densely contaminated with landmines can therefore be viewed as a social leveller, where every person, regardless of their background or past deeds could reinvent themselves and their position within society.

As one of the first settlers in the village, the VC spoke to me about his life when he first moved to the area. He had previously lived in Battambang town, but had had his land grabbed and was desperate to move to a place where he could have some land of his own to farm with his family. He was charged with allocating land to newcomers by the VC in the next village which was a complex and difficult process, as many people came to the village, but few were able to stay permanently because of the hardships of living in a place that had no road access, no water and was heavily mined. This meant that plots of land changed hands many times over, and in some cases, people who had left the village after staking a claim in rainy season and then returned at a later date found that their land had been reallocated to a different family. PM, a villager originally from Preah Veng explained that only people who had come to live in the village from a long way away stayed permanently, as they had no other choice. CW explained that she had not known anyone else in the village when she first arrived, a sentiment that was reiterated by many of the villagers I interviewed. Several villagers spoke about the isolation they experienced at that time living in a densely forested area that separated them physically, socially and emotionally from their neighbours. What came across strongly was the lonely lives that people lived as they tried to establish themselves in the forest.

During this time there was no pagoda in the village, no school, no market, no shops and no amenities. There were no places to meet and gather socially and each family concentrated on their own livelihoods, cutting down bamboo and wood to build their homes, and clearing trees and vegetation and in some cases mines in order to be able to cultivate land for rice. This was a disparate community, with limited interaction between neighbours, and a high level of transience as people arrived from all over the country in search of land. The lack of strong social connections negatively affected the people in the village, as they had no one to turn to if they needed help and support. The preceding Khmer Rouge period where husband was set against wife, brother against brother and neighbours against each other had bred a culture of mistrust that still permeated the villager's consciousness. The continual movement of people in and out of the village further exacerbated this sense of distrust, and the villagers spoke of this time as one where they concentrated on themselves and their families. The majority of people I interviewed had some association with the Government forces, many of the men were ex-soldiers, some had been captured by the KR and endured forced labour in the region, although I did meet a few former KR soldiers who had much later been integrated into the community. The binding factor for all of the villagers was their need for land, but they

remained wary of each other, preferring instead to rely on their own abilities to establish a life for themselves and their families.

The dispersal of people across the country is not a rare occurrence, and from talking to the villagers it was clear that it took many years for people to feel that the village was their place, where they belonged. Maintaining close relations is an important facet of wellbeing, and is linked to developing this sense of belonging. MY, who had lived in a refugee camp for many years moved to the area in search of land following the death of her husband from lung disease. She recalled how difficult life was for her as she tried to adjust not only to living in a new place, but also being without her husband to support her. Many villagers had left their extended families behind, signifying a change in the social dynamics of family life.

At the time that the village was first settled, the villagers had to rely on their own abilities to clear their land of vegetation, and sometimes mines so that they could begin to cultivate crops. SM spoke about chopping down trees and clearing his plot of land so that he could build a small house and begin to cultivate land. BR echoed this point and explained how it had taken him over two years to clear his small plot of land so that he could grow rice. However, there were signs that when possible, the villagers pooled their resources, particularly in the search for water. This reveals that the struggle to transform the forest into a habitable place, and the difficulties obtaining water resulted in the development of a shared sense of identity and belonging among the early settlers as they were united by adversity. This mirrors Arensen's (2012) assertion that the common struggle to survive formed the basis of kin-like relationships in the mine-affected village in Ratanak Mondal<sup>25</sup> where she undertook her doctoral research.

The landmine situation also provided an opportunity for villagers to create new relationships with new arrivals. Early settlers were able to demonstrate their standing within the community by sharing their knowledge about the mine contamination. CW explained that when she arrived in the village, the other residents told her which areas to avoid because of landmines. There was also a core group of male villagers who were viewed as mine experts because of their time in the army. Their knowledge and skills elevated their social position within the village, as they could be called upon to detonate any ordnance found by others. One former Government soldier, JC, who lived in the village, explained that he had some knowledge of landmines from his time in the army and understood about the different types so knew which

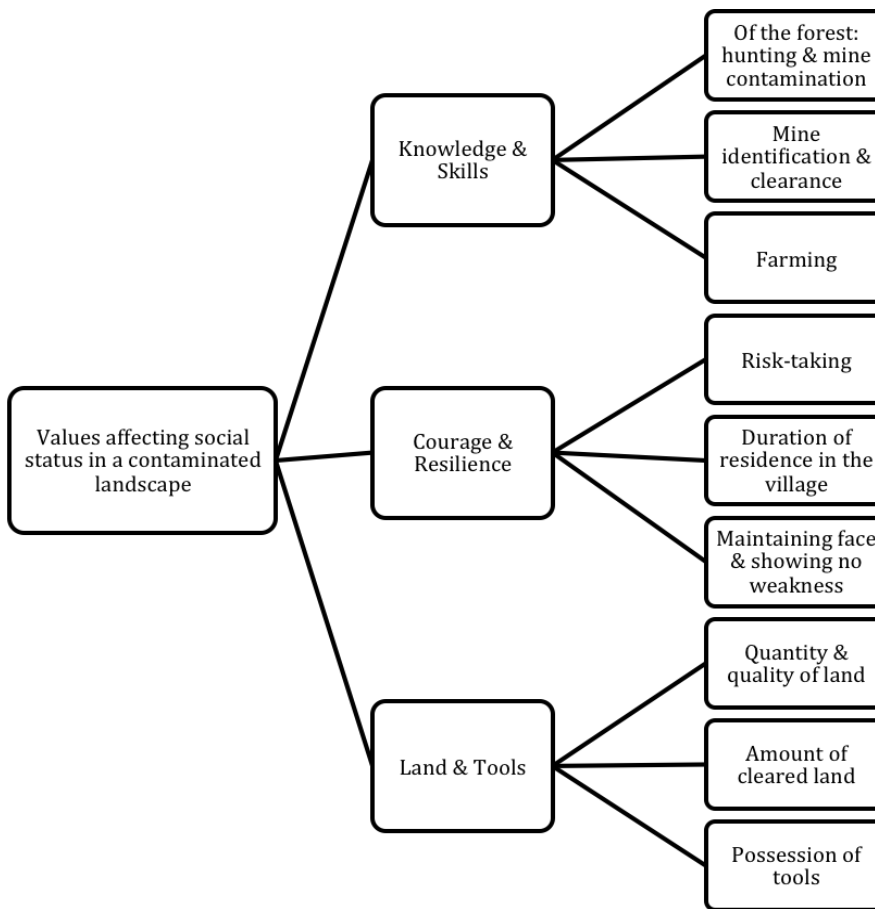
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<sup>25</sup> Ratanak Mondal is a nearby district to the village within Battambang Province.

ones he could neutralise and which ones he could not. OM, a former KR soldier who lived in the village explained that other villagers brought unexploded mines to him to detonate. He told me that he used to put them on the ground, cover them with firewood, light a fire and then watch them explode. He explained that many villagers used to collect mines, UXO and bullets and take them to CMAC after they had arrived. The risks that the villagers took collecting mines, and indeed detonating them, shows that although they feared the remnants of war, they believed that it was more important to remove them from the ground than to leave them there where others could possibly be injured. This is interesting as although the villagers had some understanding of the different types of mines, there was no way that they could know which ones would explode if they were moved and which ones had been neutralised through decay. In some ways this could be classed as unnecessary risk taking that endangered individuals. On the other hand, these actions reveal that there was a growing sense of community, as people tried to protect others by removing mines from areas where other villagers may unsuspectingly walk.

From interviewing the villagers, it is clear that the extreme situation of those living in a mine-contaminated landscape meant that different criteria were employed to distinguish an individuals' position within society. Practical skills and abilities took on greater weight, which masked the traditional social hierarchy that is based on who you are rather than what you can do. This is summarised in the following diagram:

Figure 27: Values affecting social position within a contaminated landscape



While life for the villagers at that time was materially hard, from a relational perspective they had more freedom to interact with others on an equal basis. This allowed for a greater sense of pride and dignity in their own abilities to sustain a living, without being limited by oppressive social structures. However, with mine clearance and the arrival of more people in the village, the structure of social relations was again transformed. Instead of a person's social status being based on their knowledge, skills and abilities to survive in a hostile environment, the traditional hierarchical structure of Khmer society had reasserted itself, which resulted in people's capabilities being narrowed, and no one being equal to anyone else (Ledgerwood 2007).

Living in a contaminated landscape affected the lives and wellbeing of the villagers in a number of ways. Life was extremely hard, and physically demanding as the settlers had to chop down trees and vegetation in order to prepare the land for planting. The emphasis was on self-reliance, and the villagers led isolated and claustrophobic lives as they were constrained by the physical environment. In addition, the presence of mines resulted in high levels of fear that

affected every aspect of the villager's lives - fear of the mines themselves, fear for the safety of themselves and their families, fear of the forest and the dangers of wild animals and fear of the restless spirits of people who had died in the area. Despite the constant fear and stress that the villagers experienced, without walking and working on suspected hazardous land, they would not have survived. Risk taking therefore became part of their everyday lives. However, while the fear and the struggle to survive negatively affected their wellbeing, living in a contaminated landscape also afforded opportunities they would not otherwise have had access to. United in adversity, individuals were able to improve their social standing by demonstrating their skills and knowledge to other villagers. In addition, the presence of landmines enabled villagers to lay claim to a plots of land that would otherwise have been beyond their reach. As such it can be concluded that the wellbeing of the villagers was both positively and negatively affected when living within a contaminated landscape.

### **Part Three: Wellbeing in a partially contaminated landscape:**

When I lived in the village, CMAC were on their third swathe of mine clearance and had undertaken a number of development activities in parallel. These consisted predominantly of improvements to the infrastructure of the village and included building more substantial earth roads that ran through the village, and several village ponds. The villagers expressed their gratitude to CMAC and reported that their lives were much better now that clearance and development had taken place. As several villagers told me,

“Now it is much better than before because we have a road, after CMAC came to build it. When the road was extended, more and more people came to live here, and there are a lot of people here now so I feel happy and warm.” FL, female villager

“As soon as CMAC came to clear the mines, my life changed a lot. I have a small tractor, I have a house, although not a big house, I have a comfortable house, and if I want to go out I can. I feel free. I don't worry about anything.” MY, female villager

“Now we are not afraid and we don't worry about things. Now we have a road, we have a pond, we have a school and the village has started to develop. If you talk about living in our village now, it is not bad. Even if we walk or go somewhere, it is not difficult like before. It has changed a lot.” PA, female villager



“But now CMAC have cleared all the landmines and we have a road now and we can walk easily. We have a pond and we don’t have a shortage of water anymore. In total, we are not short of anything right now. But now we say that water is not good, but comparing it to the past, it is much better now. And they have built many roads in the village. We are not worried about the landmines anymore, even in the rice fields.” PY, male villager

From the villagers statements it can be seen that combined clearance and development has improved their lives and wellbeing. They no longer live in constant fear, are able to safely access their land and cultivate crops. The villagers can travel freely along the new roads which enables them to safely go the pagoda and visit friends in the community. In addition, the roads mean that they can more easily access the market in neighbouring villages to sell their crops and also buy essential goods. Accessing water is also easier with the building of the village ponds, although during my time in the village these were running dry due to lack of rain. However, mine clearance has also had a negative effect on the lives on the villagers.

While the village was heavily contaminated with landmines, few people wanted, and indeed, were able to live there. Theoretically, clearing mines from the everyday landscapes of local people should result in an improved level of wellbeing, which to a certain extent, for the villagers, it has. However, my data reveals that once mines are cleared from the ground, the villagers are then faced with a new and different set of vulnerabilities, as land becomes a valued, coveted and much sought after commodity. Paradoxically, mine action can therefore be seen to negatively as well as positively affect peoples’ lives.

As mine clearance continued in the village, more land became safe, increasing its value and attracting more people to the area. Although partial clearance had greatly improved the lives of many of the local people, it has also caused difficulties. As one villager noted:

“Everyone is very happy now because CMAC have come to clear the land. But they have also started to have land disputes as well. When the land was full of forest, no one wanted the land. But when the land was cleared by CMAC everyone knew, and people came because they needed land.” MS, male villager

This is a key point, and demonstrates that while living with landmines negatively impacts the wellbeing of affected people, once mine clearance begins, a number of other issues arise for

the villagers, including disputes over land ownership, land grabbing and the foreclosure of loans offset against land.

#### **7.4.1 Land disputes:**

Once CMAC began clearance, many more people were drawn to the village seeking land. This, coupled with the confusion surrounding the ownership of a number of plots in the village resulted in a number of disputes over land ownership as new people attempted to establish their place in the village. At the same time, the third swathe of mine clearance extended safe access into the fields surrounding the village. This meant that dangerous areas that had previously lain fallow could then be cultivated, resulting in some disputes over where the exact boundaries of peoples' land lay. When disputes arose, it fell to the VC to mediate between the two factions, and find a solution. However, people with more money were able to influence decisions, increasing the likelihood that poorer villagers would be disenfranchised, making it more difficult for them to sustain a living. This demonstrates that an individual's social standing has direct bearing on their ability to defend their position, which, for the majority of the villagers, meant that they held little sway or influence over decisions that could negatively affect their lives.

The land titling Mission exacerbated an already difficult situation for the villagers, and the number of land disputes escalated. There were over 60 disputes in the village while I was there and many of the villagers spoke about their frustrations with the amount of land that they were losing in the land titling process. AF explained that she was very upset, as she had lost a large corner of land from her plot. She told me that the Mission had refused to listen to her, or to acknowledge the boundaries that she had demarcated. Instead they had undertaken their own measurements, leaving her helpless and frustrated at being unable to challenge their decision. This reveals a different facet of social relations – how the villagers interacted with those in positions of authority. The university students measuring the land were quite obviously much younger than the majority of villagers. However, their status was increased because they were more educated than the villagers, and had also been charged with the land-titling mission by the Prime Minister. My observations of the land-titling mission lead me to conclude that the university students had little respect for the villagers, ignored their concerns about the loss of land and had little understanding of the impact that their decisions had on the lives of the local people.

NA, an elderly woman I interviewed, told me that she had a dispute over land with a rich man, and that he was saying that the plot she owned actually belonged to him. She explained that she was too scared to go and tell the Mission, as she did not think that they would believe her, and so was planning on moving after rainy season in order to avoid any trouble. His henchman came to her house and told her that she had to move and do so quickly, otherwise he would burn her house down. She responded by saying that unless he agreed to let her stay until dry season she would not put her thumb print (in lieu of a signature) on the land title document, which he eventually agreed to. Listening to her story, it was clear that those with money and higher social status were able to influence decisions, while the ordinary villagers were being coerced and threatened and in some cases, thrown off their land.

Numerous other villagers spoke to me about their increasing resentment with the way land disputes were being mediated by the Mission. JS explained to me that he was in a dispute over 3 hectares of land that a richer and more powerful man claimed he had owned for many years, but which the villager believed was his. He told me that he had never seen the rich man and so went to visit the Mission to see if the dispute could be resolved. The only solution that the Mission staff offered was to split the land evenly between the two parties, which the villager felt was not a good or fair resolution to the issue. He went on to say that there was a lot of corruption in the country and those people with money always got what they wanted. He was vociferous in his condemnation of the legal system and said that if you had money, judges could turn black to white and white to black. For him, however, as he had no money with which to bribe people, life was hard. This supports Richmond and Franks (2007) assertion that the high levels in corruption in Cambodia has resulted in the majority of people having little agency politically, economically or socially.

#### **7.4.2 Land Grabbing:**

Land grabbing has been happening in Cambodia for many years, on a small scale, as in the village, and also on a much larger scale throughout the country. One international mine action actor, BL, spoke about a well-documented case of land grabbing by a Cambodian Army General. Several hectares of land had been cleared of mines, at great expense, and had been earmarked for the local villagers as farmland. However, the General forcibly took the land and turned the area into a huge chilli farm, rendering the villagers landless, displaced and desperate, but with no power to oppose what had happened. Forcible evictions due to land concession policies and small scale land grabbing continue in numerous places across the country, and it is usually poor people with little money or influence who suffer.

Many of the villagers were concerned that richer and more powerful people would come and try to take their land from them by force. One woman, CA, who was visibly distressed by her situation told me that she constantly worried that someone would come and force her from her home as she did not own land, but only rented it. She explained that the landowner had promised she could retain a small plot of land as her own if she cleared the surrounding area of vegetation, which she had spent several months doing. However, the landowner changed his mind, and informed her that he wanted the plot where her house was for farmland, forcing her to move, even though she had nowhere else to go. A few days after speaking to her she packed up her family and her belongings and went to seek factory work in Phnom Penh, as she had no money to buy rice and no land on which to grow it. She was also trying to escape from an abusive husband, and was trying to find a better life for herself and her children. This, however, proved unsuccessful and she returned to the village after several weeks where, she was able to find laboring work. Other villagers had also faced forced eviction from their homes. The group of landless families who lived on the edge of the village, who were the most materially poor people I met in the village, explained that they had been forcibly run off the land they were renting by a group of people they called the Association, who threatened them with knives and told them they would set fire to their children if they returned.

During the land-titling mission when tensions escalated, the Governor of Battambang came to the village in an attempt to calm the situation. He spoke about the Association that had allegedly grabbed the land from the landless families, informing the amassed villagers that they were illegally holding several thousand hectare of land that in reality belonged to the Government. He announced that a full investigation would be launched to try and resolve both this issue and another land grabbing issue in the village. One of the rich landowners in the village had accused several local people of grabbing his land. The District Governor supported the villagers, but the Provincial level supported the rich man. This highlights the contentious nature of land rights, and reveals that in many cases poorer people are disenfranchised because they have no power, money or authority with which to influence decisions. Perversely, they were only in this situation because the land had been cleared of mines, demonstrating that they had exchanged one set of vulnerabilities and dangers for another, both of which negatively affected their wellbeing.

### 7.4.3 Foreclosure on loans:

Nearly everyone in the village had some form of loan. Some people had borrowed seeds from the 'rich' man in the village, which had to be paid back in kind. For every sack of rice that they borrowed, they had to pay back two, and if they could not pay back the rice that year, then the interest doubled, and the year after they have to pay back three sacks of rice for each one that they have borrowed. However, borrowing money, rice or seeds against land was a dangerous strategy for many villagers, who had not fully considered the implications when they could not repay their loans. As loans are offset against land, then if the villagers defaulted on their payments, they were liable to have their land taken from them to cover the debt. As one man explained:

"A few of the people in this village borrowed rice from the rich man. When they had no rice to pay back the loan, he took their land instead." PY, male villager

The inability to pay back loans was a constant worry for many of the villagers I interviewed. Several villagers explained that they took out other loans just to pay back the interest on their original loans, and were in considerable debt. There were a number of empty houses in the village, and JS explained that several families had fled to Thailand because they had defaulted on their loans which had been guaranteed by the VC. He said:

"In the past some people in this village lost their land and their farms. The house that is close to the VC's house, lost their land because he owed money to the bank, and when he couldn't repay the loan, they took his land instead." JS, male villager

The large amount of money that many of the villagers owed had serious implications for their future survival. As mine clearance continued in the village, more land became safe, enhancing its value, and increasing the amount of money that the villagers could borrow against it. Land that is contaminated with mines is not an attractive asset for moneylenders, so it was not in their interests to foreclose. However mine-free land is a different matter, and several people had lost everything after reaching a point where they could no longer repay their debts, leaving them landless and desperate. There are indications that as mine clearance continues, in the not too distant future there will be many thousands of landless families throughout Cambodia who have lost everything because they were allowed to borrow large amounts of money that they realistically have no way of repaying. This highlights the vulnerable position that many of the villagers were in whereby microfinance organisations and individual lenders

began to calculate that it was more profitable to foreclose on mine-free land, rather than continue to allow villagers to service their debts.

The above discussion demonstrates that the hierarchical nature of social relations in Cambodia significantly constrains the villagers' lives, often resulting in them being marginalised, exploited and segregated within society. This supports Galtung's (1990) analysis of the effects of structural violence. However, that is not to say that the villagers did not resent the situation in which they found themselves. As can be seen from the discussion of issues surrounding the land-titling mission, although the villagers felt powerless, they still voiced their frustrations, albeit it in a relatively quiet way. In addition, a number of villagers I interviewed spoke about their disillusionment with the situation in Cambodia, and more specifically in the village. DN explained that he did not believe in patron-client relationships, which had caused him difficulties with other villagers. He went on to say that he knew of many problems in the village, but could not tell me specifically as he was worried that this would put him in danger. JS echoed this sentiment and told me that in order to have a peaceful life, he generally kept his opinions to himself about the way the village was run, although there were many decisions that he did not agree with. Speaking more broadly, WM told me that the people no longer had a voice, and if they did speak their minds, they got into trouble. It was clear that the villagers recognised the inequalities and injustices they were experiencing, but had not, at that time, dared to overtly challenge those in authority.

## **7.5 Concluding Thoughts:**

This chapter has explored the villagers' experiences and understandings of wellbeing and the various ways that living with landmines affects their quality of life through a wellbeing ecology approach. The relationship between the local people and the environment was a cross-cutting theme that was intertwined with every aspect of the villager's lives. This demonstrates the importance of considering socioecological relations in humanitarian and development settings, as, for the villagers, it was impossible to separate the natural and social worlds. Instead, the villagers revealed that they had a physical, emotional and spiritual relationship with the land that had to be renegotiated because of the presence of mines. By putting place at the heart of the analysis by utilising the concept of contaminated landscapes, and explicitly acknowledging the different types of relationship that people have with the environment, I have offered a different perspective on the ways that mines affect the lives of local people. In this way, landmines have been reconceptualised as a combined humanitarian and environmental issue.

My findings revealed that, unsurprisingly, land is of key importance for the villagers as a means of sustaining a livelihood. However, owning and cultivating land is also linked to a number of other aspects of their lives that emphasises the importance of considering not only peoples' material circumstances, but also the subjective and relational dimensions of their wellbeing. Land binds families to each other as they live and work together and slowly enables people to begin to develop a sense of dignity by planting, growing and harvesting rice, not only for food, but also so that surplus crops can be sold for much needed income. Being self-sufficient is important for the villagers as it means that they can begin to put down roots, plan for the future and develop a sense of belonging to a place that was, for the majority of people, a new settlement. Most of the villagers came to the village in search of land. Some were IDPs, other were refugees seeking a new home following repatriation, whilst others had little or no land of their own in their original hometowns. Securing land was therefore seen as the first step to establishing a new life in a new place.

Rural people in Cambodia live a very hand-to-mouth existence. Their ability to thrive and flourish is dependent upon having sufficient land to grow enough food to feed their families as well as the right environmental conditions in which to do so. The presence of landmines makes life more difficult for rural people, as it reduces the amount of land that they can safely access. Due to the precarious nature of their situations, local people took risks on a daily basis by living and working on suspected hazardous ground, foraging for food and water in mined areas and labouring in other peoples' field that may have been contaminated. This resulted in people leading claustrophobic lives as they were unable to travel safely either to visit their neighbours, or other villages, could not send their children to school, were unable to let their livestock roam free and had to rely on their immediate family for all support. Living in such a contaminated landscape negatively affected the wellbeing of the villagers on a number of levels: physically, spiritually, economically, socially, psychologically and emotionally. People were constantly stressed and fearful, as the belief that landmines might be present was just as debilitating as if there were clearly demarcated minefields. This resulted in an incredibly isolated existence whereby people had to rely only on themselves and their close family because the presence of mines inhibited the formation of strong social bonds within the community.

My findings reveal that the villagers were initially relieved and grateful to have had their land cleared, which led to improved levels of wellbeing as they felt safe farming and going about their daily lives. However, this was juxtaposed with an increasing uncertainty about their

ability to maintain ownership of their farms. Mine-free land is in demand, and other people are constantly seeking to secure their own plots through fair or foul means, resulting in land disputes becoming more prevalent. The villagers are materially poor, many with little education, and have limited power to assert their rights to reside in an area, which puts them in a precarious position if more powerful people are determined to grab their land. In addition, when faced with an offer to buy their plot, many villagers were unable to see past the immediate relief that this would bring, to the longer-term difficulties they may then face as they become landless, with no means of making a living. Additionally, most villagers had a number of loans with microfinance organisations that were offset against their land, and with changes in the environment and climate resulting in poor harvests, this left them vulnerable to foreclosure if they were unable to continue to make repayments, as mine-free land is much more valuable than contaminated land. In this way, it can be seen that mine clearance is a double-edged sword, which on one hand improves peoples' lives, but on the other, makes them more vulnerable.



## **Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter presents the main contributions of this thesis for theory, policy and practice. I begin with a discussion of the main findings of this research. By comparing the data from the mine action and village interviews, I explore the similarities and differences in the conceptualisation of landmine impact. In doing so I answer the first subsidiary research question: how do different actors conceptualise mine contamination and the effect it has on wellbeing? Following this, I discuss the utility of wellbeing ecology, in particular the way that place is conceptualised as a contaminated landscape. This attends to the third sub-research question: how is wellbeing ecology useful for the conceptualisation of mine contamination?

The next section of the chapter focuses on the implications of my findings for policy and practice. I consider three main contributions. First, that the environment is a missing dimension from current thinking surrounding mine action, in particular issues relating to land rights and tenure. Second, that the prioritization of clearance and subsequent releasing of land is an inherently political process and should be explicitly recognized as such by the mine action sector. Third, I contend that mine clearance alone is not enough, and discuss the benefits and difficulties of combining mine action with development.

The chapter then moves on to discuss the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of my research. From there I consider the contribution to knowledge that this thesis has made before briefly documenting some avenues for future research.

### **8.1 Conceptualisations of mine contamination and the effect on wellbeing**

By interviewing both local mine-affected people and international and national mine action actors, this thesis is able to offer a comparison of understandings of the effect of landmine impact on wellbeing. In doing so I problematize the views of mine action actors by putting them alongside the views of the villagers, and draw explicit attention to the institutional and organisational environments that shape these understandings of mine contamination and impact. In addition I highlight what is missing from their conceptualisation by bringing the villagers' perspective into the account. This is important as it allows for an analysis of current mine action policy and processes and points towards ways that these can be improved by

incorporating local level understandings of the ways that landmines affect quality of life. The implications of this for policy and practice are discussed later in the chapter.

Both the mine action actors and the villagers identified two main impacts of landmines: landmine accidents and the wider difficulties people face when living with the continual presence of remnants of war. The majority of mine action actors understood the effect that landmine accidents have on individuals in terms of loss of income and economic capital. The financial cost of immediate and long-term medical care were recognised as significant impacts for individuals involved in landmine accidents and their families. In addition, the detrimental effect that losing a breadwinner due to the injuries sustained by a landmine accident was identified as a major issue for the family that negatively affected their material circumstances. The emotional and psychological effect that a landmine accident would have on an individual was a secondary impact identified by the mine action interviewees. The villagers also recognised the financial and human costs of landmine accidents, and in addition placed emphasis on the psychosocial impact of landmine accidents. Loss of self-esteem, depression and increased levels of alcohol abuse were mentioned as negative consequences of landmine accidents that could lead to a breakdown of family relations. This was exacerbated by discriminatory attitudes towards people with disabilities that led, in some cases, to social stigmatization and isolation.

There were also similarities and differences in the way that the mine action and village interviewees understood the impact that the continual presence of landmines has on affected people. The mine action actors viewed landmine presence as an inhibitor to development, reducing access to land and basic resources. This was conceptualised predominantly in terms of cost, reflecting a material focus that is shaped by the organisational culture and institutional architecture surrounding mine action, and is in keeping with the dominant socioeconomic discourse in humanitarianism. Although the mine action actors empathised with the situation of mine-affected people, it was clear that it was difficult for many interviewees to fully understand what the reality of living with the presence of landmines is like for local people. Less mention was made of the emotional impact that living in constant fear would have on local people or how living in a contaminated area would curtail social freedoms and affect the dynamics not only of individuals and families, but also the wider community. While it is understandable that people working in the mine action sector focus on more tangible effects of landmine presence, this presents only a partial picture of the ways that landmine presence and indeed clearance affects peoples' lives.

The danger of such a conceptualisation where the focus is placed on the material ways in which the presence of mines affect people is that less space is apportioned for the way people react emotionally to the circumstances in which they find themselves. As Kent, drawing on the work of Simmons and Bottomley (2001) asserts, “Development intervention in Cambodia has focused on a functional approach to absolute poverty and on delivering material resources instead of looking at the structural causes of inequitable distribution. The influence of factors such as the feelings evoked by poverty – contempt or pity for the poor by those who are richer, and shame, resignation or frustration among the poor – are rarely considered.” (2012: 169). While mine action in Cambodia appears on the surface to be predominantly concerned with removing landmines from peoples’ everyday lives, there is a risk that insufficient regard is given to the effect that such activities have on the social structures of rural villages and the emotional impact of living with landmines. This is supported by my findings from the village which show that people were affected not only materially, but also socially, psychologically and emotionally by the presence of mines.

The villagers also spoke about landmines denying them access to land and livelihood, highlighting the way that their relationship with the land and the environment was disrupted and transformed. Nature was no longer a nurturing support system, but instead became a threat to their lives and wellbeing. This presents a different perspective to the mine action actors who while recognising the importance of land, failed to consider the impact of landmines on socioecological relations. The local people also placed more emphasis on the psychosocial, articulating feelings of fear, isolation and worry about having to venture into suspected hazardous land in order to survive. In addition, the villagers highlighted the changes in social relationships and structures while living in a contaminated landscape, thereby emphasising the social impact of landmines. This conceptualisation of landmine impact in terms of material, relational and subjective wellbeing confirms that for mine-affected people, crisis had become context (Vigh 2008).

## **8.2 The utility of Wellbeing Ecology: contribution to theory**

Wellbeing ecology is a holistic place-sensitive approach that considers the inter-connected and dynamic social, economic, emotional, physical and spiritual relationships that people have with each other and their environments over time. As such it is a broad orientation that emphasises the importance of relationships for wellbeing and represents a contribution to the theorisation

of socioecological relations.

The different approaches to the conceptualisation of socioecological relations developed in response to different histories and traditions, but what they have in common is to bring the social into an arena that has traditionally been dominated by the natural sciences – the analysis of environmental problems. It is therefore understandable that they all highlight social determinants of environmental degradation. Wellbeing ecology, however, has a different starting point. Instead of focusing on the way that human action has harmed the environment and the consequences this has for people, wellbeing ecology explores what it means to have a good life in a particular context. In developing wellbeing ecology, the integral relationship between human and environmental wellbeing became clear to me. As such, wellbeing ecology seeks to develop a more balanced approach to socioecological relations that brings together human and environmental wellbeing.

It can therefore be argued that wellbeing ecology builds on and extends a number of existing approaches. First, while human ecology emphasises the importance of place in socioecological relationships, it has a weaker conceptualisation of human wellbeing. By adding a wellbeing dimension I extend the scope of human ecology to reflect a more holistic understanding of the ways that these relationships affect the quality of people's lives. Second, wellbeing ecology builds on political ecology and environmental sociology which privilege political and social processes respectively in the analysis of the causation of specific environmental problems, but have a lesser emphasis on the way people interact with the natural environment. By giving equal weight to the relationships people have both with and within the environment wellbeing ecology places a greater degree of emphasis on coupled social and socioecological systems. This allows for a greater depth of understanding of the ways that both the social and natural environments in which people are situated influence human wellbeing.

Wellbeing ecology considers that wellbeing inheres in the relational. This begins with the individual and moves outwards to incorporate the broader social and natural environments in which people are embedded. At an individual level emphasis is placed on the relationship between mind, body and spirit – intra-personal relations. Moving outwardly, wellbeing ecology then considers the importance of relationships between people – social relations. This situates individuals within the broader social context and highlights the way that understandings and aspirations of wellbeing are mediated by our relationships with other people. However, it is not only social relations that are important for wellbeing. Of equal significance is the multi-

directional relationship that people have with the environment – socioecological relations. Changes in the natural environment result in changes in human behaviour and changes in human behaviour result in changes in the natural environment. This mutually reconstituting relationship between the social and the natural is of key importance for wellbeing and affects people physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. In this way, I contend that human wellbeing is inherently linked to environmental wellbeing, and a good quality of life cannot be fully achieved when the surrounding ecological system is damaged or degraded.

However, rather than developing wellbeing ecology in the abstract, what I am seeking to do in this thesis is to explore this approach within the context of a particular place – a contaminated landscape. While emphasising the co-constitution of human and environmental wellbeing, wellbeing ecology also draws attention to the significance of place. Place is not conceived as a passive backdrop to social activity, but as a constituent part of everyday life that can negatively as well as positively affect people's lives. Within wellbeing ecology, place is conceptualised as landscape, which is defined as the site of interplay between humans and nature (Gelser 1992). In the particular context of this research, the presence of landmines creates a contaminated landscape, a term I developed during the course of my research. By considering how living with landmines affects wellbeing, I examine the ecology of people and place over time by discussing how these relationships evolve as the villagers moved from living within a contaminated landscape to a partially contaminated landscape. This reveals the complex interactions between relationships, which together constitute an ecology of wellbeing.

If a therapeutic landscape is viewed as a place that is thought to promote wellbeing (Gelser 1992), and is made up of places of opportunity, restoration, sociality and safety (Sampson and Gifford 2010), then a contaminated landscape would be a place that negatively affects the wellbeing of the people living within it. Similarly, I suggest that the constituent parts of a contaminated landscape are: places of danger, places of risk taking, places of isolation and places of fear. At an individual level, living in a contaminated landscape reduced safe access to livelihood activities, put people in danger because of the risks they took living and working on suspected hazardous ground and inhibited the development of social relations. This resulted in the villagers living isolated and claustrophobic lives, relying on their own abilities to survive and their immediate family for support. Living in constant fear - of the forest and the restless spirits thought to dwell there, of wild animals and also of landmines – was detrimental to the villagers emotionally and psychologically.

More broadly, the Khmer social hierarchy shaped the villagers' relationships with others. Social status, power dynamics and social convention influence expectations of what it means to live a good life, and the position of an individual within society either inhibits or assists their attempts to reach this goal. My research suggests that for those people living in a heavily mine contaminated landscape the traditional social structure of Khmer society was suspended. This allowed the original settlers to lay claim to land and also improve their social status based on their skills and knowledge, resulting in a degree of wellbeing despite the physical dangers posed by the presence of mines. However, with the onset of clearance, the traditional hierarchy was reinstated as more people moved to the area seeking land, leading to an increase in disputes, mounting social tensions and disenfranchisement of poorer and less powerful members of the community. This highlights the ways that individuals within the same social system affect each other, and how the broader social structures of society differentially enable or constrain the pursuit of living a good life.

As it is through farming land that the villagers sustain a living, they have an intimate connection with the natural rhythms of their surroundings. However, the presence of landmines disrupted the relationship that the villagers had with the land and wider environment physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. The transformation of the environment from a nurturing provider to a hostile threat significantly affected the way that the villagers thought about and engaged with nature, thereby reconstituting socioecological relations. This demonstrates how past human actions impact on the environment, which then influences subsequent socioecological relations, revealing the inherent link between people and environment that is in a continual process of transformation and renewal.

To conclude, I contend that mine contamination affects a number of inter-related systems and as such, cannot be fully understood without adopting a relational approach. In this way wellbeing ecology offers a new approach to the conceptualisation of landmine contamination that offers a deeper and more holistic interpretation of the ways that the presence of mines affects the wellbeing of people living amongst them. The concept of contaminated landscapes allows for an analysis of the way that landmines affect the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the natural environment in a particular place over time. By considering the systemic, inter-connected and dynamic social, emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual relationships that people have with each other and the environments in which they live, it is possible to develop a localised understanding of wellbeing that is mediated through shared experiences of place. This draws attention to the importance of socioecological relations in

humanitarian and development settings, thereby reconceptualising the issue of landmines to reflect a combined and interlinked humanitarian and environmental perspective.

### **8.3 Key contributions for policy and practice:**

As shown above, while there are similarities in the way that the mine action actors understood the effect that landmines have on wellbeing, there were also some marked differences. What are the implications of these different understandings for policy and practice? I contend that there are three main contributions of my research that have implications for policy and practice: the natural environment as a missing element, mine action as a political process and integrating mine action with development, which I will now discuss.

#### **8.3.1 The missing environment**

Mine action at field level is influenced by the motivations and aspirations of individual actors, and is shaped by the local context, the organisational culture of the particular agency and the institutional architecture of donors as well as national policies and international law. However, I contend that there is a missing element that mine action, and indeed the broader humanitarian sector fails to recognise sufficiently, that has a direct bearing on the lives and wellbeing of affected people – the natural environment. This is in keeping with the humanitarian literature, which is only now beginning to incorporate the environment as a key consideration in humanitarian settings. As UNEP/OCHA argue in a report on the environment in humanitarian action, “Environment is still not systematically taken into account in global humanitarian action, despite being critical for effective, sustainable and accountable humanitarian response.” (2014:5).

I argue that the environment should be incorporated into current thinking surrounding landmine impact for a number of reasons. First, wellbeing for the villagers revolves around land, and the relationships that the people have with and in the wider environment. Without recognising and explicitly acknowledging this, the mine action sector cannot fully understand how the presence of mines affects the quality of life of local people.

A second reason for incorporating the environment into mine action relates to the way that mine clearance is undertaken. From interviews with mine action actors and observing mine clearance in the village, it is evident that clearing vegetation and trees from the immediate surroundings precedes the use of mine detection equipment prior to mine clearance. Although King (2004) suggests that the development of large vegetation clearance machines to

undertake this job can be viewed as progress, I contend that their use is also detrimental to the environment as they destroy everything in their path. Preparing the land for clearance has resulted in deforestation, the destruction of flora and fauna, and a loss of biodiversity in mine clearance areas. While it is not yet possible to analyse the impact that this has had on the villagers, the implication is that over time this environmental degradation will affect the climate and the productivity of the land, negatively affecting the long-term wellbeing of villagers. This then points to the need to reconsider the way in which mine clearance is undertaken, as environmental degradation can have devastating effects, particularly in this case, on rural populations, which could result in villagers living in a different, but equally as debilitating contaminated landscape. As such, I contend that mine action organizations need to reconsider their strategy of using large demining and vegetation clearing machines, as the short-term benefits achieved from quicker and more efficient clearance must be balanced against the long-term damage that such environmental degradation could cause. One possible solution would be for trees and vegetation to be replanted post-clearance, offering a more environmentally sustainable approach to mine clearance. I suggest that incorporating this approach in the operational mandate of mine action organizations would represent a positive step to reducing the environmental impact of the mine clearance process.

A final reason why the environment should be incorporated into the conceptualization of mine contamination and impact is the long-term impact of mines as pollutants. As Htun (2004) contends, while landmines have obvious immediate impacts that result in death and injury, they also have long-term consequences. He states, "These problems often occur silently, are not immediately evident, occur over prolonged periods, and have equally significant social and economic effects. The overall impacts on the wellbeing and welfare of the people are similar. Contamination of water supply sources and land by pollutants, especially persistent organic products and hazardous wastes, have been correctly described as "time bombs" akin to planting of landmines and dropping of UXO." (2004:176). With this in mind, I contend that there is a need for further long-term research that investigates the detrimental effects that landmines as pollutants of the environment have on the lives and wellbeing of affected populations.

To conclude, it is my belief that the natural environment is a missing element in the current conceptualisation of landmine contamination. I therefore contend that mine action organisations should combine environmental impact with social impact in their analysis of the effect that landmines have on the wellbeing of affected people.



### **8.3.2 Mine action as a political process**

As Hilhorst and Bankoff contend, “It is important to recognize that the same social and cultural processes that give rise to vulnerability are partly subordinate to, and enmeshed in, broader processes that are expressions of international and national political and economic considerations. Moreover, the co-optation of vulnerability as a state of affairs that development attempts to address fails to reveal how development processes actually generate vulnerability.” (2004:3). This is important, and particularly relevant to the findings from my research. On one hand clearance activities remove the physical danger of mines from the everyday landscapes of local people, decreasing their vulnerability and exposure to the hazards and associated risks that these bring. However, on the other hand, these interventions increase the vulnerability of local people to a different set of hazards relating to land rights. This type of vulnerability is embedded within Khmer society where the desire for land has resulted in disputes and tensions, land grabs, loss of livelihood through distress sales and increasing levels of landlessness. With this in mind, it is important to discuss the ways that the prioritisation of clearance and subsequent releasing of land is undertaken, which highlights mine clearance as a political process that is shaped by the international, national, organisational and local environments.

Land acts as the critical juncture where the villagers’ priorities meet those of the mine action actors. As such, mine clearance activities impact on the lives of local people by changing the status of land from contaminated to mine-free. I contend that mine action actors can no longer claim to be neutral or apolitical. They are intimately involved in a political process and therefore have the power to deliver or deny the very thing that is central to the lives and wellbeing of the local people - land. The issue of land rights, and the political nature of releasing mine-free land to individuals and communities, has implications for the policy and practice of mine action organisations. As De Waal (2009) contends, humanitarianism has neglected issues surrounding land, which he believes is unsurprising, but also striking. He states that “...humanitarianism as an organised activity has only slowly come to grips with the idea that it should be concerned, not just with the preservation of bare life, but also with the protection of ways of life.” (2009:9). This is a key point, and highlights the importance of considering land rights in post-conflict settings. More specifically within mine action, the 2013 DfID evaluation contends that issues surrounding land rights can no longer be avoided by clearance organisations.

In a situation such as Cambodia where land rights are opaque, and many changes in land ownership law have taken place in recent years, mine action organisations have a duty to make sure that they are fully aware of the local land situation in order to minimise land disputes or people grabbing plots from less powerful members of the community once clearance has taken place. This is supported by the GICHD (2014) who contend that without an understanding and awareness of land law and rights, mine action actors risk undertaking activities that are inconsistent with the law, and are unable to advise beneficiaries of their land rights which would assist in strengthening their tenure of land or the resolution of disputes. They argue that, “This lack of legal awareness is a major missed opportunity that is easily rectified through land law training of MAPUs, operators and other key actors.” (2014:24). I agree with this suggestion, and contend that training on land rights and land law should be incorporated into the organisational mandates of mine action organisations as they are intimately involved in releasing a valuable and much sought after commodity back to people who are often poor, marginalised and voiceless within Khmer society.

International mine action organisations are in Cambodia by invitation, and therefore their continued presence is dependent on them undertaking tasks and activities that have been approved by the Government and local authorities. A mine action organisation cannot just go into an area of their choice, start clearance and then release land. Instead, they are subject to the dynamics of that particular locale, and must balance decisions about clearance between meeting the needs of local people, following the national mine action strategy while also observing donor and organisational mandates. This demonstrates that regardless of how needs assessments, prioritisation and releasing cleared land are undertaken, there is always a tactical and political element to mine action activities. In addition, mine action organisations are not viewed as apolitical by the local populations, and in reality, have a large degree of control and power to positively or negatively affect the lives of local people.

The decision about where to start clearance in any given locale requires negotiation with local communities, predominantly with the village, commune and district chiefs, therefore bringing into play political hierarchies and local level power struggles. However, there is a tension here, as what may be a priority for the Village Chief may not reflect the needs of the community as a whole. This raises the second implication for policy and practice. While acknowledging the difficulty of working in immediate and longer term post-conflict settings, I contend that there is scope for both national and international mine action organisations to improve the process of community consultation. By developing more effective methods and systematically applying

them in the field that include gathering clearance prioritisation information not only from those in authority, but also from the more marginalised and less powerful, there is greater likelihood that those most in need will be reached and benefit from mine clearance activities. I contend that greater analysis and consideration must be given to the ways that mine action organisations interact with existing power hierarchies and decide how, when and to whom mine-free land is released. This is an area for further research, perhaps as a co-operative enquiry engaging a variety of mine action actors and organisations that assesses existing practice and identifies more effective community consultation processes in order to inform best practice for future projects. However, until such a project is designed and implemented, I suggest a starting point would be for mine action organisations to place more emphasis on the role of community liaison.

While mine action no longer attracts only ex-military personnel, there is a continuing technical dominance within the sector (both in terms of equipment and personnel). My interview data showed that there were two distinct camps among the mine action actors: those who were technical and believed that they should decide where, when and how clearance should take place, and other mine action actors, including community development specialists and organisation managers who believed that it was only through liaising with the community that decisions should be made about mine action activities in any given area. During fieldwork I also discovered that while some organisations purported to ensure that the local communities participated in the decision-making process, in reality, most information gleaned from needs assessments and community liaison was unused in the planning and prioritisation process, and was instead, more of a tick box activity that would demonstrate some form of consultation with affected-populations to satisfy donor requirements. In addition, conversations with several community liaison managers working in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam revealed that they often felt marginalised and side-lined by the technical explosives experts, who made decisions about clearance prioritisation based on their own agendas, rather than the needs identified by the communities themselves. This signposts the need for a degree of organisational change within mine action agencies to better incorporate community liaison as a focal point and driving force, which was as one organisation manager noted, the original intention when this approach was introduced into mine action in the 1990s.

The way that impact is assessed is another issue highlighting the political nature of mine action. Mine action organisations are under pressure from donors to show that the intended beneficiaries are using land as intended, although they rarely have the resources or indeed the

power to ensure that this is the case in the long term. When I talked to the various international mine action actors it was clear that although they tried to ensure that those worst affected and most vulnerable received the land that had been cleared, it was outside their power to conduct long term post-clearance impact assessments. This was recognised as a weakness in the sector by the 2013 DfID evaluation of mine action which states, “At present there isn’t a strong body of evidence around whether the shorter term positive outputs from Mine Action is leading through into longer term outcomes in terms of improved livelihoods or development investment leveraged. The ability to monitor long-term impacts is not being put in place by the current funding agencies. Mine Action is not alone in this.” (IOD PARC 2012:14). The interviews with the mine action actors support this and demonstrate that there was an inherent focus on outputs and outcomes, rather than impact, revealing a need for better developed systems to evaluate mine action activities. In addition, the interviewees highlighted the lack of donor funding for long-term evaluations as a barrier to implementing effective ex-post impact evaluations. As one interviewee stated, donors want to know the long-term impact of mine clearance, but are not prepared to fund such evaluations. This calls for a change in policy at donor level to focus on outcomes rather than impact, or to allocate sufficient funding for mine action organisations to be able to develop and conduct such long-term impact assessments.

A further difficulty faced by mine action organisations relating to impact assessment is that they have no control over the movement of people away from areas. As HP, a national mine action actor, explained it was difficult to measure the success of clearance projects in the long term as in some places he had visited several years after projects had been completed, there were very few families who had been direct beneficiaries still living in the area. While villagers are asked to sign contracts saying that they will not sell the land for five years, both national and international mine clearance organisations have little real authority to challenge people about these issues once land has been released. While it is understandable that mine action organisations want to ensure that the cleared land is used for its intended purposes, as mine clearance is a painstakingly slow and expensive process, the rights of local people are also important. If a specific piece of land is cleared for a particular family, once it is handed over to them, does it not follow that they then have the right to use it as they see fit? Placing constraints on local people in this way effectively reduces their freedom of choice, and represents a form of aid conditionality that has the potential to negatively affect their lives once clearance has been completed. However, on the other hand, these constraints may also protect poorer and more vulnerable people. If they are legally bound to keep the land, they

cannot therefore be pressurised into selling. This remains an unresolved issue for mine action actors and villagers alike, demonstrating how contentious land release and land rights can be post clearance.

Relating to the political process of mine action, but at a broader national and international level, is the way that the Ottawa Treaty is being interpreted by the RCG. The competitive tendering and the need to meet the Treaty quota has resulted in areas being prioritised for clearance on the basis of ease of access and acreage targets, rather than considering the needs of the most affected. As a result, people living in remote rural mine-affected areas remain, in some cases, unassisted. This was a source of frustration for many of the mine action actors I interviewed, as they tried to balance meeting the mandate of the Treaty as outlined in the national mine action strategy, while also meeting the needs of affected populations. This then represents a critique of the national mine action strategy.

Despite the concerns raised by both the international and national mine action actors I interviewed, ultimately, it is the responsibility of the national Government to make these decisions. It is the RCG and the CMAA that develops the national mine action strategy with input from the various mine action organisations, which is then implemented on an annual basis. If the Government decides to opt to demonstrate that in any given year x number of hectares have been cleared in order to meet the Treaty mandate, rather than clearing mines based on the needs of the most affected populations, there is very little that any of the mine action organisations can do. Having a national strategy and a mine action authority that is in control of stipulating where and when mine clearance takes place is a positive step, and indeed the CMAA is held in high regard by donors, and conducts training and knowledge transfer with numerous delegates from other mine-affected countries such as Burma, Colombia, Angola and Laos.

However, there is a danger that the focus is now being placed on more quantifiable indicators of success such as the number of mines taken out of the ground or the amount of square meters cleared, rather than the benefits that the local mine-affected people may reap from these activities. This has serious implications for those living in the most contaminated and inaccessible areas of the country, as it is unlikely that these places will be prioritised for clearance. I therefore contend that the RCG and CMAA need to reconsider the way that the Ottawa Treaty is interpreted, and reframe the national mine action strategy to reflect the priorities of the most vulnerable and in need mine-affected communities. By clearing for

development, rather than clearing for targets, when reporting back at high-level meetings of State Parties, the Cambodian government will be able to demonstrate that their focus of mine action is humanitarian rather than technical. Instead of clearing numerous mines in areas where few people live, the focus needs to be concentrated more fully on residential and agricultural areas where even taking one mine out of the ground makes a huge difference to the lives of people living there. In this way, funds will still be secured for continuing clearance, and the real underlying rationale behind the Treaty will be met.

A final critique rests with the donors providing funding for mine action. I contend that the way that funding decisions are made brings into question whose needs are deemed more important: those of the donor, the implementing organisation or the local people? This raises the issue of accountability, a key debate within the humanitarian literature. If, as suggested from the interviews I conducted, mine action organisations are increasingly being forced to conform with donor mandates in order to secure funding, their core values and principles are slowly being eroded, a point raised by Barnett and Weiss (2008) in relation to humanitarian organisations more generally. In addition, the changes in the rationale behind funding has led, in some cases, to certain mine-affected people being deemed more deserving than others. This supports Vaux's (2001) argument that politically motivated donor decisions can result in humanitarian activities causing harm as well as good.

### **8.3.3 Integrated mine action and development**

My research suggests that mine clearance alone is not enough to ensure the improved wellbeing of local people. Many of the villagers had few skills or resources with which to farm land, had no means of increasing crop yields, were unable to access basic amenities and once their land was free of mines, this was just the beginning of another challenge. Without combined community development and mine clearance, there is a risk that cleared land will remain unutilised and the people intended to benefit from having their land cleared will sell it in order to gain some short-term monies on which to live. In the village where I stayed, there had been a series of development activities taking place in tandem with clearance, which were a result of consultation with the local communities. These involved infrastructure development such as building a thoroughfare through the village to enable people to more easily access markets in the nearest town where they could sell their crops, or alternatively to allow traders to visit the village to buy the surplus rice, sesame and corn that the villagers were growing. The road also enabled the development of better social connections with other people in the community, allowed people to freely visit the pagoda and meant that children could travel

quickly and safely to school. In addition, a number of village ponds had been dug, because securing water had been extremely difficult for the villagers prior to clearance as the nearest water source was 15 km away. Alongside the infrastructure improvements, there had also been a series of agricultural skills training sessions so that the villagers could learn or re-learn the methods necessary to farm their land effectively. The villagers had also started a community organisation of their own that consisted of a savings group and a community fish and vegetable project that was partly funded by an NGO in Battambang with the aim of increasing income, and having a hardship fund that could be accessed by the association members in times of needs, although this was in its infancy during my time in the village.

For those people who live in areas where development activities do not follow or run alongside mine clearance, things are very different. Many are unable to survive and migrate to towns and cities in order to find paid work, thereby nullifying the benefits of clearing the mines from the ground, which then remains fallow and unused. For mine action actors who need to demonstrate that their work is making a difference to peoples' lives, this represents a problem, as donors are unlikely to continue to fund clearance in places where the intended recipients do not then use the land for the purposes it was meant for. However, it is often the most desperate and vulnerable people that live in mine contaminated areas, as they have no other choice. In some cases, this has resulted in people who are less poor being targeted for mine clearance activities as they have the resources to use the land, leaving the needs of the most vulnerable unmet. This assertion is supported by a DfID evaluation of mine action that states, "Our findings suggest that the prioritisation process for de-mining does not always consider which land will deliver benefits to the poorest and most vulnerable; who often lack access to essential resources (such as seeds or farming equipment). The Programme should actively work towards ensuring increased impact for the poorest and, over time, influence national prioritisation processes to become pro-poor focused." (WYG International 2013:viii). This demonstrates several things: that prioritisation of land to be cleared is sometimes based on ease of access rather than need; that at times people can be deemed too poor for mine clearance; and that there is a need for more combined development and mine action projects. In addition, as my findings revealed the negative psycho-emotional impact that living with landmines has on local people, this suggests that there may also a need for some form of psychosocial programming, although what form that would take is a subject for future research.

Combining mine action with development is difficult for international mine action organisations as their expertise lies in technical aspect of clearance and they do not have the capacity to undertake parallel development activities. This means that they have to partner with development organisations working in the area, which was a source of tension for several of the international mine action actors I interviewed. However, while all of the mine action actors agreed that ideally the link between mine action and development should be strengthened, the reality of the situation prevented effective joint projects, as many development organisations do not work in heavily mine-contaminated areas. This is a problem for mine action organisations, particularly when donors stipulate that in order to secure funding they must partner with a development organisation. This therefore represents a critique of donor funding strategies. I contend that donors require some institutional learning so that they are aware of the challenges mine action organisations face in identifying and then partnering with development agencies. I also assert that establishing a partnership database in country would enable mine action organisations to ascertain where and in what sphere development organisations are working so that the best fit can be made, and could facilitate greater links between mine action and development. Such a database would also aid communication between development organisations and between development and mine action organisations. During my time in the village it was clear that several development projects had been instigated by different agencies, which could have benefited from a more co-ordinated effort. This would also counter the PRA fatigue that the villagers suffered from by reducing the need for successive development organisations to gather the same information about the village and the villagers' requirements for future projects.

While there is a need for donors to reconsider their funding mandate, I contend that to achieve more integrated mine action and development, a degree of institutional learning is also needed by both mine action organisations and development agencies. It was clear from the interviews with international mine action organisations that although they knew and worked with a limited number of development agencies, they did not have extensive ties with the broader development community. This assertion is supported by the 2013 DfID mine action evaluation that concluded that linkages between mine action and development are not well articulated or understood and argue that mine action is often not tied to the process of development. This points to the need for a greater understanding among mine action organisations and development agencies of the mutual benefits of working together, which would more importantly enhance the effectiveness of projects designed to improve the lives and wellbeing of affected people. A partnership database would also be useful here as once



established it would enable both mine action and development organisations to have a more holistic picture of the activities and projects being undertaken in specific areas, and a greater understanding of how joint initiatives could be designed and implemented while building on existing relationships with communities. In addition, I contend that as donors are increasingly calling for mine organisations to demonstrate the impact of their work, a combined mine action and development approach would potentially allow them to report both short and long term benefits of mine action.

The current relationship between mine action and development organisations was also highlighted as an inhibitor to combined projects. First, several interviewees believed that they were treated as service providers, instead of equal partners in the development process and were called upon to undertake clearance purely based on the development organisation's needs, rather than through any joint form of design or planning. This points to a need for development organisations to better understand what mine action is and how and where it is undertaken, which could again be facilitated by a partnership database. Second, the competition for funding was viewed as a potential barrier as it created tensions between mine action and development organisations as they are increasingly vying for the same shrinking pot of money. I therefore suggest that donors consider awarding joint funding to both mine action and development organisations who could then design and implement these projects. Monitoring and evaluation in the short term could then be jointly undertaken by the mine action and development organisations, and in the longer term, by the development organisations who are more likely to maintain links with the communities once clearance has been completed. This would assist mine action organisations in providing impact assessment data to donors without having to undertake longer-term evaluations themselves, which at present are untenable due to funding and resource constraints.

It can therefore be concluded that mine clearance alone is not enough, and the integration of mine action with development is key for the future. This is supported by Carrier who notes, "A development approach can actively complement existing mine action assistance as a way to reduce the vulnerability and increase the sustainable livelihoods of individuals and communities affected by mines and other ERW. It is not a case of replacing mine action but associating it with development models and interventions to shift attention away from mines and other ERW and instead to focus on people and sustainable livelihoods." (2011:13). However, in order for this to happen, there needs to be a greater degree of co-ordination between mine action and development organisations whereby more equal partnerships are

developed, with joint funding, prioritisation and implementation occurring. In addition, this requires development organisations to undertake work in heavily mine contaminated areas where they do not usually have a presence. This is no easy task, but my findings show that there is willingness on the part of mine action actors to try and undertake these types of projects if they find the right partners to work with.

#### **8.4 Wellbeing dilemmas and trade-offs in a contaminated and partially contaminated landscape**

I contend that the villagers experienced a series of wellbeing trade-offs as they moved from living in a contaminated to a partially contaminated landscape. Whilst living in a contaminated landscape, the physical risk of mines and the negative impact their presence had on their wellbeing was weighed against the opportunity to claim land and therefore livelihood - something that was beyond their reach if they had stayed in their original hometowns. In this way it can be concluded that the villagers' wellbeing was both positively and negatively affected when living in a mine-contaminated landscape, supporting Arensen's (2012) assertion that living with landmines offers both promise and peril.

Once clearance had begun, the villagers faced a number of different wellbeing trade-offs. The deforestation caused by the clearance techniques coupled with the villagers chopping down vegetation in order to create a space to grow crops resulted in changes in the microclimate. This represents the first wellbeing trade off, as although the land was free of mines, the changes in the weather patterns had devastating effects as plants either died in the field from lack of rain, or were washed away when it flooded. Second, the villagers' ability to forage for firewood (to use and sell) and vegetables to supplement their diets was also severely curtailed, as the only remaining forested areas surrounding the village were still contaminated with mines. This meant that the villagers had to buy vegetables, which from my observations, was not often possible, as they did not have the financial resources to do so. Although the forest had been a dangerous place it also represented a valuable source of both food and income that has been lost following the onset of mine and vegetation clearance.

A third wellbeing trade-off relates to the change in the status of land. With the onset of clearance the villagers' wellbeing had improved, as they felt safe going about their daily lives. However, this was juxtaposed with an increasing uncertainty about their ability to maintain ownership of their farmland. As more people moved to the area seeking mine-free land this increased the number of disputes over plots and boundaries, and the risk of land grabbing. As

McBeth and Bottomley assert, “The current environment in Cambodia is replete with land grabs by private interests, often facilitated by government and backed by fierce intimidation, including arrest, imprisonment and violence.”(2013:118). As the villagers are materially poor, many with little education, they have little power to assert their rights to reside in an area, which puts them in a hazardous position if more powerful people are determined to lay claim to plots of land through fair or foul means. For the villagers, this represents a different type of vulnerability, a form of structural violence that is rooted within the fabric of Cambodian society, where the disadvantaged become increasingly disenfranchised due to the nature of the institutional environment in which they live. This was further exacerbated by the land-titling mission which resulted in heightened levels of stress and tensions as disputes over land became more prevalent. This negatively affected the villagers as social bonds became strained and their lives and wellbeing were threatened by an initiative that was originally designed to increase their security. It can therefore be concluded that the villagers were equally, but differently vulnerable living in a partially contaminated landscape.

#### **8.5 Strengths, Weaknesses and Limitations of the Research:**

My research was undertaken in one community in Cambodia and as such it is difficult to generalise about the situation of all mine-affected people in the country. This represents the first limitation of my research, although I contend that there is still scope to offer some implications for theory, policy and practice as outlined above. In addition, despite conducting the research in only one setting, as I lived in a mine contaminated village for several months, this allowed me to gain first-hand experience of what it means to live with landmines. During my time in the village I was able to observe the situation and could immerse myself in village life, spend quality time with the local people and gain a greater depth of knowledge than would be possible with a one-off short term visit.

A second limitation of my research is that I do not speak fluent Khmer, and had to engage the services of a translator while living in the village. I acknowledge that some of the nuances of the language people used were lost in translation, and in addition, my translator wielded a certain degree of control and power over what exactly was related back to me. However, on the positive side, my translator proved to be very adept at putting people at their ease, encouraging them to share their stories while treating everyone he met with respect and dignity, which I found to be a valuable trait. Despite the language barrier I was able to effectively communicate with the villagers, and spent time and effort developing relationships

of trust with a variety of individuals and their families so that I could better understand their situations.

A third limitation of my research is that I did not include any interviews with representatives from donor organisations. This would have allowed for an additional perspective to be added to the research, and a greater understanding of how donors view their role within the sphere of mine action. While I did interview a variety of international and mine action actors from a number of different organisations, my research could also have benefited from engagement with development professionals working in the country to gain a developmental perspective of the ways that landmines affect the lives and wellbeing of local people.

A final limitation is that wellbeing ecology as an approach is in its infancy. As such it needs to be nurtured over time so that it matures and develops into a framework that can be applied to a variety of settings in the future. However, the development of wellbeing ecology is also a strength of this research as it presents a new way of thinking about the way that people construct notions of wellbeing. A further strength of my research is the variety of qualitative methods that I utilised. In particular, the use of visual methods proved to be enjoyable, positive and rewarding for everyone involved and allowed me to glimpse what wellbeing means for local people through their own eyes. In addition by incorporating a variety of interviewees that included people of all ages and both sexes, local mine-affected villagers, people who had survived landmine explosions, national deminers, international mine action actors such as country directors as well as technical mine clearance experts I was able to garner a number of different perspectives about the way that landmines affect the lives and wellbeing of people.

## **8.6 Contribution to Knowledge:**

The first main contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes is the development and presentation of wellbeing ecology. I contend that a wellbeing ecology is an approach that can be used for exploring the effect that landmines have on the wellbeing of local people that can, with further development, be utilised by mine action organisations to frame their conceptualisation of mine contamination and the subsequent impact it has on the lives and wellbeing of local people.

The second main contribution to knowledge is the presentation of local understandings of what it means to live in a contaminated landscape. Providing a villager perspective is

important because, “The study of local perceptions could be a cornerstone of a better understanding of the management and impact of humanitarian action. Without such studies, humanitarian organisations will miss opportunities to see how their actions are interpreted and mediated at the local level, and concomitantly to improve their activities.” (Dijkzeul and Wakenge 2010: 1141). In addition, as Harpviken and Millard assert that in order to understand the impact of landmines and ERW more fully, and to ensure that mine action programmes are more effective, national level surveys and individual accounts should be supplemented by community level studies as “improved assistance to mine-affected communities must start with a deeper understanding of the situation faced by people living in these communities.” (2000:27).

In addition, this thesis adds to a number of bodies of existing literature in a variety of ways. While there have been a number of studies on therapeutic landscapes in their various guises, there is a scarcity of research on the negative implications for wellbeing of living in an environment that is physically contaminated. This thesis therefore addresses this gap and adds to the therapeutic landscape literature. My research also adds to socioecological literature by demonstrating that a healthy environment is important not only for the wellbeing of indigenous people, but also rural agrarian people who rely on the land for their livelihood and wellbeing. This thesis also makes a contribution to the wellbeing literature with the development of wellbeing ecology as an approach for framing the conceptualisation of people’s quality of life. Methodologically, the use of participatory photography and photo-elicitation interviews adds to the wellbeing literature by demonstrating that images have the power to reveal, to a certain extent, how wellbeing is visualised and articulated by the people taking the photographs. Finally, this thesis contributes to the humanitarian and mine action literature by presenting a mine action perspective of the ways that landmines affect the lives and wellbeing of local people that is compared and contrasted to the understandings of local people. These understandings can be used to demonstrate the gap in current thinking about mine action effectiveness that suffers from a predilection to focus on the material benefits of clearance. In addition, it highlights tensions and frustrations between implementation of activities at field level and donor decisions made in distant offices, mirroring key debates in the humanitarian literature surrounding accountability, impact assessment and the conditionality and politicisation of aid. By conceptualising landmine contamination as both an environmental and humanitarian issue, that emphasises the intertwined and bi-directional relationship rural people have with the environment, a more holistic analysis of the ways landmines impact on peoples’ lives is offered. This type of person-in-environment approach emphasises the

importance of place for wellbeing, and demonstrates that living in a physically contaminated landscape affects people not only economically and materially, but also socially, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. This presents a marked departure from traditional conceptualisations of landmine contamination that fail to fully consider the mind, body and spirit of affected people, and the importance of place making for wellbeing to flourish.

### **8.7 Future Research Directions:**

This thesis presents an exploration of the ways that one group of local people and a variety of international and national mine action actors understand the impact of landmines, and as such, presents a starting point for further research. In order for wellbeing ecology to be developed as an approach that can be used by mine action organisations for needs assessment, design, and evaluation purposes, more research needs to be undertaken that expands the scope of this research, incorporates other settings and a larger sample. There is also a need to learn about the situations of more recently mine-affected people to compare how they conceptualise their own situations and how this differs from people who have lived within a contaminated landscape for a number of years.

In addition there is a need for further research that focuses on the way that mine action organisations prioritise clearance activities. I suggest that a co-operative enquiry that brings together people in different positions within a variety of mine action organisations to investigate how information about community needs is gathered that also evaluates the way that local power dynamics are negotiated could significantly inform practice and improve upon future projects.

A final avenue for future research would be the application of wellbeing ecology to other kinds of contexts, for example urban or peri-urban areas. This would allow for an exploration of how wellbeing is affected by the relationships between people and with the environment in different places at different times.

### **8.8 Concluding Thoughts:**

This thesis presents a wellbeing ecology approach to determine how landmines affect peoples' lives. Wellbeing is defined here as having what you need for life to be good, and consists of three interrelated dimensions: the material, the relational and the subjective. In this way my aim was to capture not only what people have, but how they think and feel about what they have and how this affects and is affected by the people around them. This approach presents a

positive, holistic and inclusive way of thinking about peoples' lives that incorporates mind, body and spirit, one that is open to all regardless of age, sex, race or circumstances and focuses on strengths rather than needs. In doing so, people's experiences, understandings and knowledge of their own lives are placed at the centre of the research, and one viewpoint is not privileged over another. Framing this conceptualisation of wellbeing is a broader socioecological, person-in-environment approach that considers peoples' bi-directional and intertwined relationship with the environment. By widening the scope of indigenous studies that argues that environmental wellbeing is inherently linked to human wellbeing, my research supports the assertion that rural agrarian people also have a dynamic relationship with the environment and are negatively affected when the natural system around them is contaminated, in this case, with landmines.

The connection that local people have with the land emphasises that the environment is considered not only in physical terms, as in what the land can provide for people, but is also linked to their emotional and spiritual wellbeing, demonstrating the intrinsic value of land. By owning and farming land, close relationships are made and maintained, and a sense of dignity is established. This highlights the importance of place for wellbeing, supporting Schaaf's (2012) assertion that place can disable or enable wellbeing and is also central in guiding what is valued.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to deepen the understanding of the ways that landmines affect the wellbeing of local people. I believe that I have achieved this by presenting an analysis of the similarities and differences in thinking between mine action actors and local villagers in their conceptualisations of landmine impact. In order to do this I have developed wellbeing ecology, which offers a new way of seeing the interconnectedness of the social and natural worlds. This is a positive step as it offers a different way of conceptualising the devastating effects of remnants of war that I hope will usefully contribute to the continuing battle to rid the world of these deadly weapons of war and improve the lives and wellbeing of those living with landmines.







## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Details of indicators used to identify poor households in Cambodia

Table 2: Indicators utilised to identify poor households in Cambodia

Socioeconomic Group	Socioeconomic Subgroup	Socioeconomic Characteristics
Housing	Housing	Roofing material Wall material Condition of house Floor area of house
Ownership	Assets	Owens radio, mobile phone, battery charger, etc.
	Livestock	Raises fish and/or owns pigs, cows, buffaloes, etc.
	Transportation	Owens bicycle, motorbike, boat, etc.
Productivity	Active members	Members cannot produce income
	Income generation	Grows rice, fishes, other
Food security	Food security	Borrowed rice in last 12 months

Source: Identification of Poor Households Programme, Ministry of Planning, Royal Government of Cambodia 2012: 5

## Appendix 2: Type and extent of landmine contamination in Cambodia

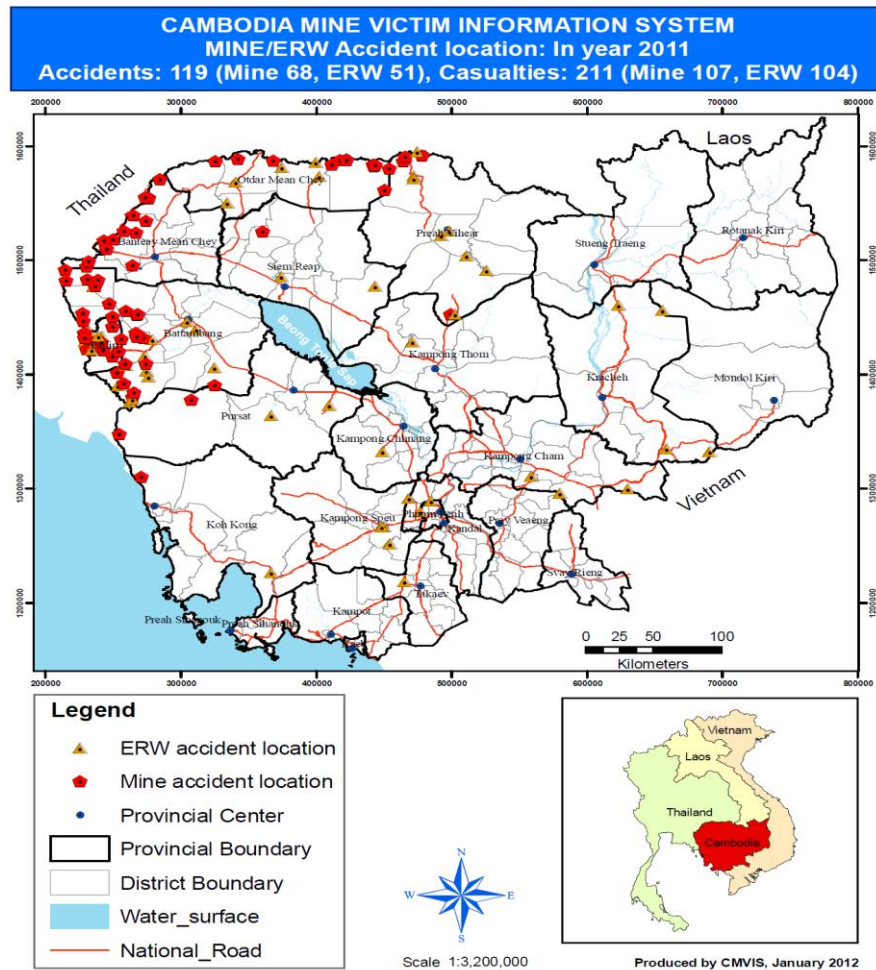
Table 3: Baseline survey results for 124 districts affected by landmines

Classification	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )
<b>A1</b> Dense AP mines	63,894,629
<b>A2</b> Mixed AP and AV mines	78,601,787
<b>A2.1</b> Mixed dense AP and AV mines	9,154,925
<b>A2.2</b> Mixed scattered AP and AV mines	216,840,425
<b>A3</b> AV mines	68,187,332
<b>A4</b> Scattered or nuisance mines	674,882,897
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,111,561,995</b>

Source: Landmine Monitor 2014

### Appendix 3: Map of reported landmine and ERW accidents in 2011

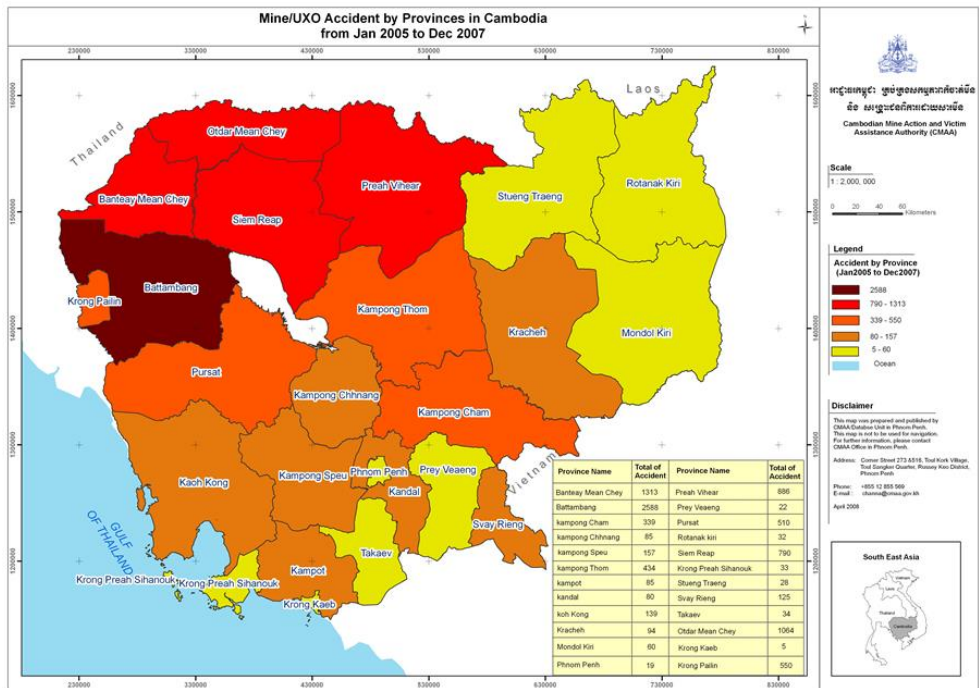
Figure 28: Location of landmine and ERW accidents in 2011



Source: Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA) 2011

Appendix 4: Map of landmine accidents by province 2005-2007

Figure 29: Map of reported landmine and ERW accidents by province 2005-2007



Source: Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA) 2014

## Appendix 5: Reported landmine and ERW casualty data by device 2009-2013

Table 4: Reported casualties by device in Cambodia 2009-2013

Device	2013		2012		2011		2010		2009	
	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured
<b>AP mine</b>	3	21	2	27	5	28	10	53	8	66
<b>AV mine</b>	12	12	23	14	11	57	29	49	13	23
<b>ERW</b>	7	56	18	102	24	80	32	113	26	107
<b>Unknown</b>	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>196</b>

Source: ICBL Landmine Monitor 2014:

Key:

APM: Anti-personnel mine

AVM: Anti-vehicle mine

ERW: Explosive remnants of war

## Appendix 6: Funding for mine action in Cambodia 2012

Table 5: International and national government funding for mine action in 2012

Donor	Sector	Amount (National currency)	Amount (US\$)
<b>USA</b>	Clearance, victim assistance, risk education	\$5,926,000	5,926,000
<b>Japan</b>	Clearance	¥259,790,633	3,254,706
<b>Cambodia</b>	Clearance		2,542,000
<b>Canada</b>	Clearance	C\$2,290,000	2,291,146
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Clearance	£1,251,116	1,983,394
<b>Finland</b>	Clearance, victim assistance	€1,475,000	1,896,703
<b>Germany</b>	Clearance	€1,100,000	1,414,490
<b>Australia</b>	Victim assistance	A\$1,325,000	1,372,568
<b>Norway</b>	Clearance	NOK7,000,000	1,203,142
<b>New Zealand</b>	Clearance	NZ\$1,233,806	1,000,000
<b>Ireland</b>	Clearance	€500,000	642,950
<b>Sweden</b>	Clearance	SEK1,350,000	199,347
<b>Austria</b>	Clearance	€110,000	141,449
<b>Netherlands</b>	Clearance	€97,074	124,827
<b>Total</b>			<b>23,992,000</b>

Source: ICBL Landmine Monitor 2013

## Appendix 7: Funding for mine action in Cambodia 2008-2012

Table 6: Summary of funding for mine action 2008-2012

<b>Year</b>	<b>National contributions (US\$)</b>	<b>International contributions (US\$)</b>	<b>Total contributions (US\$)</b>
<b>2012</b>	2,542,000	21,450,721	23,992,721
<b>2011</b>	2,874,000	35,777,295	38,651,295
<b>2010</b>	3,500,000	24,310,742	27,810,742
<b>2009</b>	3,500,000	33,275,769	36,775,769
<b>2008</b>	2,500,000	28,072,304	30,572,304
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,916,000</b>	<b>142,886,831</b>	<b>157,802,831</b>

Source: ICBL Landmine Monitor 2013



## Appendix 8: Mine action actors in Cambodia in 2014

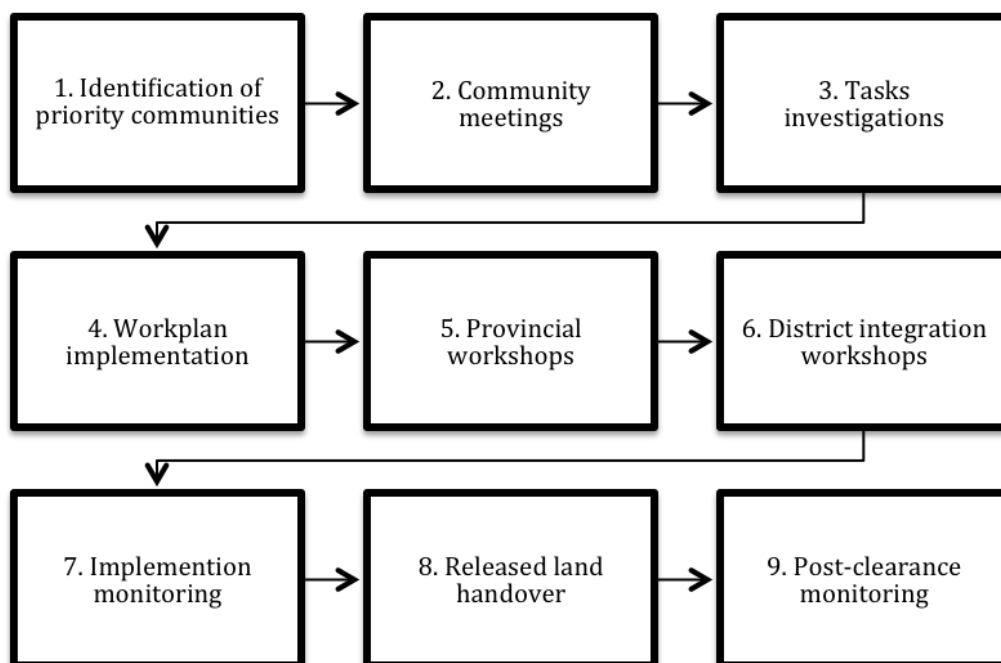
Table 7: Mine action actors in Cambodia in 2014

Type of Organisation	Situation in 2014
National Mine Action Authority	Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA)
International demining operators	Two INGOs: HALO Trust (HT) Mines Advisory Group (MAG) Three commercial companies: BACTEC Viking D&Y
National demining operators	Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) Cambodian Self Help Deminers (CSHD) Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) through the National Centre for Peace Keeping Forces, Mine and ERW Clearance (NPMEC)
International risk education operators	Handicap International-Belgium (HI) Spirit of Soccer MAG
National risk education operators	National Police Ministry of Education World Vision Cambodia Cambodian Red Cross CMAC

Source: Landmine Monitor 2014

## Appendix 9: Process for annual mine action plan in Cambodia:

Figure 30: Process for annual mine action plan in Cambodia



Source: GICHD (2014b: 16)

## Appendix 10: Landmine and battle clearance in 2013

Table 8: Mine and battle clearance in 2013

Operator	Mined area cleared (km2)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed	Sub-munitions destroyed	UXO destroyed
CMAC	28.69	11,521	284	3,475	111,074
CSHD	0.65	180	8	121	183
HALO	11.86	4,782	151	0	653
MAG	1.96	3,581	39	586	10,654
NPMEC	2.69	1,554	16	0	6,095
<b>Total</b>	<b>45.85</b>	<b>21,618</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>4,337</b>	<b>128,661</b>

Source: Landmine Monitor 2014

## Appendix 11: Details of the villagers interviewed

Table 9: Details of the villagers interviewed

Initials	Sex	Age	Size of family	Original province	Years in village	Amount of land (hectare)	Livestock	House type	Job	Location in village	Other information
HM	Male	Mid 40s	5	Preah Veng	4	None	None	Small bamboo	Labourer	North, near pagoda	Small vegetable garden surrounding house
MM	Male	Mid 30s	1	Kompot	5	None	None	Pagoda	Monk	Pagoda	
WS	Female	Mid 30s	5	Battambang	2	None	None	Small concrete shop/house with tin roof	Shop keeper	Central, VC compound	Small shop – one of four in the village
FA	Female	Late 60s	4	Kampong Chnam	13	3	3 x cows and some chickens	Small bamboo house	Farmer	North, close to VC compound	5 x grown up children living elsewhere
NY	Male	Late 40s	5	Phnom Penh	13	3	Chickens	Falling down bamboo house	Farmer	East	Refugee repatriated to Battambang. Small vegetable plot
MS	Male	Mid 40s	3	Battambang	13	2	None	Wooden shop and bamboo house	Shop keeper	North, near school	Lives with ex-wife and current wife with grown-up children elsewhere. Small shop
AF	Female	Early 40s	7	Kampong Tom	8	6	Cows and chickens	Small bamboo house	Farmer	North, near school	

PY	Male	Early 20s	5	Battambang	10	1/2	1 x cow	Bamboo house with tin roof	Farmer	Central, VC compound	Lives with mother, sister, brother and stepfather. Refugee repatriated to Battambang. Has hand-held tractor
WA	Male	Mid 50s	5	Preah Veng	10	2	None	Wooden house with tin roof	Farmer	North, near pagoda	
JS	Male	Mid 40s	6	Battambang	13	3	Cows and chickens	Bamboo house	Farmer and mechanic	North, near school	Landmine survivor. Has hand-held tractor, tools & moped
FL	Female	Mid 50s	5	Preah Veng	10	3	None	Wooden house with tin roof	Farmer	North, near pagoda	Wife of WA
NA	Female	Early 70s	5	Siem Reap	10	1/2	None	Very small bamboo house	Noodle seller	East, near VC compound	No husband. Lives with daughter, son and grandchildren. Small vegetable plot
BF	Male	Early 70s	2	Kampong Chnam	10	None	None	Very small bamboo house	Retired	East	Poor health. Rents small amount of land that a neighbour farms for him
BR	Male	Mid 40s	6	Preah Veng	8	3	Cows and chickens	Wooden house with tin roof	Farmer	North, near pagoda	
ES	Male	Mod 50s	3	Battambang	2	None	None	Very small bamboo house	Labourer	North, near school	No wife. Former soldier
MY	Female	Mid 30s	3	Battambang	2	2	None	Small bamboo house	Farmer	East, near VC compound	Has wood carving equipment

PA	Female	Mid 50s	4	Preah Veng	10	3	None	Wooden house with tin rood	Farmer	North, near pagoda	
FO	Female	Mid 40s	8	Kampong Chnam	7	3	Chickens	Small bamboo house	Farmer	North, near school	Has a bicycle
LB	Male	Mid 20s	8	Battambang	12	None	Chickens	Small bamboo house	Labourer	West	Lives with parents and siblings
FB	Male	10	5	Siem Reap	10	None	None	Very small bamboo house	At school	East, near VC compound	Grandson of NA
BM	Male	Mid 40s	5	Pursat	4	2	Chickens	Wooden house with tin roof	Farmer	North, near pagoda	
LH	Male	Early 40s	4	Siem Reap	13	3	None	Small wooden house with tin roof	Farmer	West, near VC compound	Former soldier
MB	Male	Early 50s	5	Vietnam	10	None	None	Very small bamboo house	Farmer	East	Rents land
ST	Female	Early 60s	4	Battambang	10	3	Chickens	Wooden house with tin roof	Farmer	North, near school	No husband
CW	Female	Early 30s	8	Pailin	10	2.5	None	Very small bamboo house	Farmer	North, near school	
HD	Male	Mid 50s	4	Battambang	12	3	None	Small bamboo house	Farmer and Hunter	North, near school	
WY	Female	Early 40s	5	Battambang	13	10	Cows and chickens	Bamboo house with tin rood	Farmer	Central, VC compound	Refugee repatriated to Battambang. Has a moped

BP	Female	Early 70s	1	Siem Reap	10	1	None	Very small bamboo house	Farmer	North, near school	No husband, but sister of NA
BD	Female	Early 30s	3	Battambang	11	5	None	Very small bamboo house	Farmer	North, near school	Husband works away. In poor health
JC	Male	Early 40s	7	Battambang	12	3.5	None	Small bamboo house	Farmer	East	Former soldier. Used to be in VCs working party, but stopped as felt the village was being run in the wrong way
OM	Male	Early 70s	2	Pailin	11	None	None	Very small bamboo house	Helps at the pagoda	North, near pagoda	Former KR soldier
CA	Female	Mid 30s	8	Battambang	3	None	Chickens	Very small bamboo house	Farmer and cook	East	Rents land, but was being evicted while I was in the village
DN	Male	Mid 40s	5	Battambang	2	2	None	Wooden house with tin roof	Fish seller in market in next village	North, near school	One son with a disability. Used to live in next village. Has a moped
WM	Male	Mid 40s	12	Preah Veng	10	10	Cows and chickens	Small wooden house	Farmer	North, near pagoda	

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